OVERLORD 7 The invaders of the Large tomb Kugane Maruyama

オーバーロード 7 大墳墓の侵入者

丸山くがね

Prologue

On the 10th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, in the innermost sanctum—excitement was quietly overflowing the area in front of the throne, where forty banners hung on two sides.

Without any words being spoken, the beings that gathered in the room neatly formed up in a ceremonial fashion with one hand to their chest, knelt towards the throne with their heads lowered, displaying their complete loyalty.

Not only were the floor guardians present, the other NPCs created by the forty-one Supreme Beings, as well as their servants were also gathered. The total number gathered easily surpassed 200. This was the second time the throne room was filled with this many servants since the transfer.

However, different from before, the servants gathered this time were among the strongest within Nazarick, with the average level being over eighty.

The subordinates that were accompanying Shalltear were all high-level undeads instead of the typical vampire brides. In addition, Mare even brought along the two level ninety dragons, both of which have never ventured outside before, to the throne room. The two dragons were ultra-rare creatures that were obtained from the cash shop Gachapon.

Among the carefully selected servants, some still managed to stand out. The most obvious example was the group of one hundred level forty undeads. They were lined up in a different block from the other two hundred servants.

Typically, lower leveled servants were placed near the rear end of the assembly without exception, where the treatment they receive was proportional to their level. However, this specific group of one hundred undead were personally created by the supreme ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick— Ainz Ooal Gown. As such, their status was different.

Even though every creature that was present in the room was one of Ainz's subordinates and a loyal retainer of the guild "Ainz Ooal Gown", differences in status still existed. Of course, the ones at the top were the NPCs created by the Supreme Beings, with the NPCs that were appointed as Floor Guardians ranking above all others.

Ranked below the NPCs were the POPs, in other words, monsters that are automatically spawned by the Mercenary System from within YGGDRASIL—the servants. The status of the servants was based on their level and job class, and not the floor they had spawned from.

In that case, how should they rank the undead that were created by Ainz?

This was the question that bothered the Overseer of the Floor Guardians—Albedo—the most. Should she treat them the same as other the NPCs?

When asked, Ainz had simply smiled softly and shrugged it off by saying he wouldn't care even if Albedo placed them at the very back.

Although the number of undead Ainz could summon per day was limited, the spells to create undead creatures did not require anything besides mana and a corpse. Compared to the high level servants that require YGGDRASIL gold or real money in order to spawn, it was obvious which were more valuable to Ainz, given that the only requirement for creating undead were corpses.

However, this was only from Ainz's point of view, which was completely different from what his subordinates thought. Moved by her master's generosity, Albedo responded with an "understood". However, regardless of how much she tried, the resulting formation

was mismatched. Albedo started to become troubled.

After spending all her brain power, Albedo ended up placing the undead behind the NPCs and in front of the POP spawned servants.

While all this was happening, Ainz silently observed the entire process from the highest position within the room. With the posture of a mighty ruler, Ainz's presence loomed over the throne room, filling his subjects with awe. To the people who were present, Ainz's every decree carried the weight of a God.

"To begin, I would like to thank Sebas and Solution for the effort they put in for the past month in intelligence gathering. You have done well."

Seeing the two bowing deeply, Ainz nodded his head in satisfaction. However, the real problem for Ainz had just begun. It was extremely difficult for an average salary man like Ainz to play the role of a ruler. Seeing the faces of countless subordinates radiating with respect and love simply made the pressure even more overbearing.

Ainz felt as if his stomach was aching and his heart beating extremely fast, even though these organs should not exist in an undead made of nothing but bones. However, this feeling only lasted for a fraction of a moment. Even though just seconds ago Ainz was filled with the feeling of wanting to immediately run away, the special condition of being an undead forcefully compelled him to calm down again.

In the end, Ainz managed to continue putting on the airs of a respected ruler.

"The two of you, come before me."

Both Sebas and Solution stood up at the same time and walked towards the steps in front of the throne as if they had practised it beforehand. Once they reached where Albedo stood, the two of them got back on their knees and bowed once more.

"Raise your heads. For your outstanding performances, the two of you

shall receive my praise as well as reward."

Ainz then shifted his sight to Sebas and said.

"Sebas, although you previously pleaded for Tsuare's life, the reason that I decided to protect her is because of a personal debt as a show of gratitude to someone else. It has nothing to do with the accomplishment of your previous work, as such I will still permit you to ask for a reward. Well then, let us hear your wish!"

By giving rewards to servants that had performed well in their assigned tasks, Ainz hoped to provide an incentive to motivate others to perform better. As such, Ainz used the experiences he gained in the human society to create the current scene for all to witness. This was also part of the reason as to why he allowed so many subordinates to enter the throne room.

However, the current situation also came with many risks. In front of his subordinates, Ainz had to maintain the posture and attitude of a ruler who was capable of leadership. For an average salaryman like Ainz, this was very difficult to maintain. Even so, as the last remaining member of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, he had to overcome this challenge.

I cannot betray the hopes and expectations of the NPCs who have displayed so much loyalty to me.

Just as Ainz resolved his determination, Sebas' mustache quivered.

"Offering my complete devotion to Ainz-sama is the sole reason for my existence, I have no need for—"

As I thought, these subordinates of mine possess way too much loyalty. This makes the pressure all the more harder to bear.

"That is enough, I understand your feelings. However, good work still needs to be rewarded. This is something that I as a master should do. Know that sometimes the lack of ambition in the subordinates can make their master unhappy."

"Ah! Please accept my apologies, Ainz-sama. In that case..." After several seconds of thinking, Sebas said, "I would like to ask for clothing and everyday living goods for Tsuare, who was kindly placed under my care by Ainz-sama."

"...I can provide clothes from my personal collection. Will that be fine?"

In YGGDRASIL, the cosmetic skins released were only available in limited quantities. If one missed out on them, it would be extremely difficult to acquire them. As such, players tended to buy up any new cosmetic item that looked halfway decent. This was the same for Ainz and his comrades. Because the guild had female members as well as many female NPCs, Ainz would often purchase skins regardless of whether they were meant for males or females, as long as they looked good. Sometimes he would give them to members who missed out on the sale, but that rarely happened.

The guild member who created Shalltear, Peroronchino, also shared the same inclination as Ainz, and had once said "Buying skins is like buying fap material. Regardless of whether you'll use it or not, it's always better to have a copy stored somewhere."

Because of this, Ainz ended up with wardrobe after wardrobe filled with untouched clothes. Even if he turned them into crafting materials it would still be a waste. Might as well try to make the best out of them by giving some to Tsuare. Now that Ainz thought back on this, the clothing from YGGDRASIL were all rather excessive in design, but there should at least be a few that were suitable for Tsuare to wear.

"No, that is too much. Tsuare has already received so much kindness from Ainz-sama, giving her Ainz-sama's clothes would be too much to ask."

"Is that so? ...In that case, what should I do with the clothes..."

For Ainz, who had never purchased women's clothing before, this was troublesome. What if he was misunderstood as having a lewd

fetish? His reputation within the female circles of the Great Tomb of Nazarick would definitely drop.

"How about we leave this matter to Narberal? A small problem like this should not require the personal attention of Nazarick's supreme ruler Ainz-sama."

Sebas spoke as if sensing Ainz's discomfort.

"...Are you fine with this, Narberal?"

Reacting to the command, one of the motionless NPCs who stood in front of Ainz nodded her head deeply.

"Very well. Sebas, this task has been given to Narberal. However..." Ainz grinned, "I am also fine if you treat this as a date and take Tsuare to the capital to shop for clothes."

Ainz had already heard of the relationship between Sebas and Tsuare. Although they haven't reached a physical relationship yet, it would definitely happen soon. That was what Ainz was told by Demiurge.

Demiurge, huh. Why did he suggest that forming a physical relationship between Sebas and Tsuare is a good thing? Well, I guess he was congratulating his co-worker on finding a girlfriend. Maybe they have a better relationship than I thought? Things didn't seem so good between them in the Kingdom, but I guess it was understandable considering the circumstances. It makes me relieved. Continually fighting like those two isn't healthy at all."

The reason for the conflict between the guildmembers Touch Me and Ulbert was due to something outside of YGGDRASIL. In other words, Ulbert's jealousy towards Touch Me was due to real world reasons.

The relationship between the two became tense ever since the quarrel they had that one time… Maybe that was the cause of everything.

If it was the Ainz of now, perhaps he could have understood the reason for the quarrel back then. While reminiscing the past, a

sudden voice from Sebas startled Ainz and he hastily came back from the reminiscent state.

"Is that pos-possible? If that is the case, I would like to take Tsuare along to the capital."

It's not like I want to purposely sabotage their relationship just because I am single.

When the two of them arrive at Re-Estize for their date, should I follow along wearing the Mask of Envy? It was just a childish thought.

"That is fine Sebas. Next, Solution, tell me the reward that you want."

"…I would be very happy if I could receive a few humans. If possible, I want them to be alive. And I would be even happier if the humans I get are pure."

The faces of the human captives appeared briefly in Ainz's mind. The majority of the captives that were alive were members of "Eight Fingers", the type of people that disgusted Ainz the most. Among them, the useful ones had already been tortured, and any useful information they had was already extracted. The remaining humans were currently being protected by the ones under confinement.

I can't use them. Pestonya and Nigredo risked going against my orders in order to save them.

"Very well. I shall reward you with a few live humans. However, they won't be pure. Do forgive me for not being able to fulfill the complete requirements of your wish."

"Please do not apologize, Ainz-sama. I know that my achievements are still lacking, so I am satisfied with what is given." Solution said with her head deeply bowing.

Ainz nodded with the bearing of a ruler to Solution.

"...Is that so? My thanks. The two of you may return to your positions. Next is Entoma. Come before me."

Similar to Sebas and Solution, Entoma came in front of Ainz and knelt down.

"Well then, Entoma."

"YeS!"

Such a difficult to understand voice, Ainz smiled bitterly.

"Looks like your voice still hasn't recovered."

The insect that Entoma used as her voice box could not be spawned from POP. However, it was possible to use items from YGGDRASIL to summon them. There were still a few of these insects in Entoma's room, so she could get her voice back anytime she liked. The reason why she had not done it yet was because of her personal grudge.

"Is mY vOicE tOo HoaRSe? If sO I wiLL iMmeDiAtEly go aNd FiX it."

"That is fine. I do not dislike your voice."

"ThAnK yOu vErY mUch!"

"For continuing the duty you were assigned despite your injuries, you've done well. However, it is not enough to receive the same level of reward as the two from before. Now, is there something you want?"

Rewards should not be so generously handed out. Otherwise it would lower the importance of a reward and defeat the whole purpose.

Keeping this in mind, Ainz judged that Entoma's achievements were still lacking for a proper reward. However, getting injured and not receiving anything at all would be too pitiful.

Is this the so called Purple Heart[1]? I'm not too familiar with military stuff. If that person was here he would be able to explain it to me better.

Ainz suddenly thought about the guild member who was a military otaku.

"In tHAt cAse ...AInZ-sAma, iF tHe cHanCe to kiLL tHat bRaTty giRL sHows uP, pLeASe leT me kNow. I wANt heR to alSo eXpeRIenCe tHe fEeLing of loSiNg heR voICe."

Realizing that Entoma was referring to Evileye, the mage girl that wore a strange mask, Ainz gave his consent.

"Understood. When the time comes, I will let you know. Return to your position, Entoma."

Watching Entoma head back to her original spot, Ainz began speaking once more "Now, let us move on to the next agenda."

No objection was raised. However, for Ainz, this wasn't necessarily a good thing.

As the absolute ruler of Nazarick, even if Ainz said something that was white is black, no one would object. The silence from before might mean that no one objected, however, it did not mean that the actions Ainz took were necessarily correct.

Should I create separate divisions such as the Board of Audit?

The first thing he should do is create a department that assessed the contribution of each individual in Nazarick and the appropriate rewards for them. But this would run into the problem that Sebas showed earlier. Every NPC in Nazarick pledged their loyalty to Ainz as a matter of fact and considered service without compensation to be a natural thing. It would be difficult for them to determine what sort of incentive would be appropriate, and ultimately the decision would go to Ainz.

As an organization, the overall course of action and goals need to be

made clear ...In the end, I left all the problems for Albedo to solve, and now everything is coming back to bite me. This has already exceeded the limits of ordinary people. Haa, looks like the experiences I gained in society after living for this long has no uses at all.

Ainz, or rather, Suzuki Satoru, who was originally on the receiving side, ended up having to deal with these problems and the pressure of being the one assigning the rewards. It would have been better to think about these things in Ainz's own bed, which for some reason smelled really good.

"I will now make it clear on the future directions that Nazarick will take. Demiurge, come to my side."

The possessor of the highest intelligence in Nazarick walked towards the throne, and stood on the opposite side of Albedo.

"The overseer of the floor guardians of Nazarick, Albedo, and the highest intellect in Nazarick, Demiurge, I order the two of you to explain our plans. The plans that were made in the beginning are halfway into fruition, and now is the time for everyone to hear the overall directions that Nazarick will take. If anyone present have a different opinion, raise your hand. I will grant you permission to speak."

The most important of Ainz' goal was to preserve the existence of Nazarick. No, in the worst case scenario, even if he had to abandon Nazarick, Ainz would still be fine with it as long as the NPCs created by his past comrades were safe.

The second most important goal was to make the name Ainz Ooal Gown known throughout the world. This was in the slight hope that if any of Ainz's past comrades were in this world, they would be able to reunite. However, the chance of this becoming true was extremely low.

The third was to strengthen Nazarick. This goal should probably deserve more importance than the previous one. It is true that after coming to this world, Ainz felt that the Great Tomb of Nazarick

would never fall and that "Ainz Ooal Gown" was the strongest organization in existence. However, as long as the entity that tried to mind control Shalltear still existed, partaking in too many public actions will be dangerous. Especially when facing against an unknown number of World class items, the possibility that an unknown guild is involved was quite high. That was why raising the overall power of Nazarick was the correct action to take.

The current status was that after incorporating the lizardmen into Nazarick, Ainz has been continuously creating undead in order to strengthen Nazarick's military power. However, he needed do something more.

The fourth goal was to create an effective intelligence network but this had been lowered in priority after the recent turn of events.

Ainz had thought about the priority of these goals and ordered them as such. However, as an ordinary person, this was the best that he could do, and he could not know if there were any flaws in his thinking.

This was why Ainz wanted to borrow the brainpower of Albedo and Demiurge, who were very intelligent. If it concerned only ordinary things, Ainz was fine with borrowing their wisdom. In such case, there was no need for Ainz to put himself on stage and risk embarrassing himself in front of everybody.

However, that way of thinking was incorrect.

As the master, as the Ainz Ooal Gown the NPCs believed him to be, he needed this kind of stage to show that he indeed was a Supreme Being; a truly wise sage that none would even dare to predict.

"The two of you, speak loudly so everyone can hear. Everyone in this room are elites that were selected by their Floor Guardians. It is necessary for them to understand the plans we have made for the future. To the ones below, listen well."

That's right. This was the desperate measure that Ainz had chosen to

take. The larger scaled version of the "pretend I understand, but in case others didn't, Demiurge shall once more explain it" plan. Just like before, Ainz only need to put up the pretense of being fully aware and wait for an explanation.

"Demiurge, for those who are in the dark, explain the current situation to them. Make sure to make it easy to understand. First begin with the explanation of the actions we took against the Kingdom."

"Understood." Demiurge replied as he then turned towards the assembly to begin his explanation.

That was what Ainz wanted to hear. For someone as intelligent as Demiurge, there must have been a purpose for the events to have occurred in that particular manner. However, after much thinking, the feeling that Ainz got was that somehow, they ended up doing unnecessary things.

"First, in the Kingdom, I was able to successfully reduce the authority of those in power with the help of Mare, Neuronist, and Kyouhukou. We can now begin to slowly infiltrate their ranks until the Kingdom comes under our full control."

"...Eh?"

A small sound escaped from Ainz's mouth. *Why do we need to take control of the Kingdom?* It seemed as if the explanation was different from what Ainz heard last time. Wasn't it in order to secure a steady income or to better acquire intelligence?

While Ainz was deep in thought, Demiurge stopped speaking and turned his head towards him. For once, Ainz was glad that his undead body would not let him sweat, and turned to Demiurge.

"Is there a problem, Demiurge?"

"No, it was just that I had the feeling that Ainz-sama wished to say something."

"Ah, is that so? You must have been mistaken. Continue. Let everyone know the reason behind taking control of the Kingdom."

"Yes. Now then, everyone, I hope none of you here are foolish enough to not know that by taking control of the Kingdom, we will be able to move closer towards the true wish of Ainz-sama, which is world domination."

Ainz quickly studied the faces of everyone present in the room. From the looks of things, it seemed like everyone knew about this.

Except for Ainz himself.

"...World domination?"

Just what is this?! When did it become like this? Of course Ainz couldn't say these thoughts out loud.

Ainz once again tried to use as much of his brain power as possible to quickly make sense of things. It was unbelievable, hard to accept. How did it become like this? Originally they were supposed to be quietly taking actions in the background, avoid making too many enemies, raise the fame of Ainz Ooal Gown and then reunite with past comrades. It was supposed to be just to realize these cute little wishes.

However, now it ended up being—

Why is it world domination? Just how in the hell did this happen?

Although Ainz really wanted to deny the statement, he lacked the courage to do so.

Both the NPCs and the servants all displayed the expression which said "there was no need to ask". It is as if everyone had already accepted that this was the final objective of Ainz. Suddenly it seemed as if a lonely wind blew past the throne that Ainz sat on.

Ainz Ooal Gown was the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, a peerless existence. After spending so much effort to create this kind of image, if it was broken here by Ainz himself, who knows what would happen. Would he end up becoming as pitiful as an idol without a single paparazzi, who lost all of her fan base, and could not sell her albums. The fate of Ainz would probably be even worse than that. Ainz had already managed to imagine these things in his head.

We're too invested in this plan to stop now…

However, after carefully thinking things through, world domination didn't sound as bad as it seemed.

It wouldn't be as easy as it was in games, and for an ordinary person like Ainz, the path to world domination seemed like an impossible road to travel. However, fame could be obtained—most likely infamy—and this seems like the perfect method to gain it.

The problem would be, if Ainz's past comrades were to find out about it what would their reaction be? *If the time comes, I'll just have to honestly admit that I wasn't able to successfully manage Nazarick and apologize*, Ainz thought.

And there's also the unknown enemy that brainwashed Shalltear. I can always make up some excuses... I'll be forgiven… Right?

After finding his resolve, Ainz turned towards Demiurge and said. "Oh, so you remembered."

"Of course. If it is words spoken by Ainz-sama, this Demiurge will never forget. "

"Is that so… It was the conversation from that time right?"

"That is correct."

"...At that time?"

"That is correct."

"Ah, that time… I am pleased, Demiurge."

"Thank you very much."

"However, world domination is hard to achieve."

"It is as you say."

"In that case… How do you think we should proceed?"

Ainz felt like praising himself for managing to keep his voice steady throughout the whole thing.

"What we have currently achieved will be the starting point for our future plans. I have a proposal. I believe it is time for Nazarick to publicly come out onto the global stage. If we keep things as it is, it will become more and more difficult for us to operate, should the entities that brainwashed Shalltear continue to remain hidden in the dark."

"...It is as you say."

That can't be correct, right? Ainz had thought that by remaining hidden, it would be safer. How did Demiurge arrive at his conclusion?

"I also agree, Ainz-sama. By becoming a known organization, there would be more options available to us, for example through correspondences or negotiations. It won't be like what we are doing right now, searching for clues in the dark. This is what I think."

After hearing Albedo's opinion, Ainz was able to finally accept it in his heart, and responded with "I see."

Compared with the things at the moment, it is indeed much more attractive to be able to take part in larger, more public scaled

operations.

"By controlling the Kingdom from behind the scene, we can avoid making Nazarick stand out. However, I do not like the idea of making us a part of another country."

Demiurge shook his head at Albedo's question.

"Of course not, Albedo. I too do not wish for that. Also, from the reports that we have gathered, the current Kingdom holds no charm, apart from a single person. It is the same as other countries. I believe that to place our organization as part of a country is foolish."

"And why is that?"

"If we belong to a country, our actions will become restricted. If the beings that attacked Shalltear are an organization, we will most likely lose the initiative. As such… Ainz-sama."

Demiurge looked towards Ainz as he made his proposal.

"I propose we form an independent nation called the Great Tomb of Nazarick."

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1. See on Wikipedia

Chapter 1 - Invitation to Death

1章 死出への誘い

Part 1

The capital of the Baharuth Empire, Arwintar, was located slightly to the west from the center of the empire. The Imperial Palace, home to the reigning monarch with the nickname Blood Emperor—Jircniv Rune Farlord el Nix—stood in the heart of the city. Surrounding the palace were the universities, the magic academy, various administrative offices and other important facilities which spread out from the center of the capital in a radial fashion. Truly, it was a city worthy to be called the heart of the Empire.

Although it had less inhabitants than Re-Estize, the capital of the Kingdom, the Empire's capital was much grander in comparison. Not only this, due to many years of reform, the Empire was currently experiencing the largest surge of development ever recorded in history. New things were constantly being introduced to society, which increased the opportunities for merchants to explore new markets. A constant influx of goods and talents had since been seen in the Empire's capital. For the citizens living in the capital, it was truly a time of hope and opportunity.

Within this noisy and lively city, Ainz walked with Narberal by his side.

Under different circumstances, Ainz would probably have wanted to spend some time to explore the city, like a country bumpkin coming to a metropolis for the first time. After all, there were many differences between the Empire and the Kingdom.

However, Ainz didn't have the leisure to look around right now.

His movements were gradually starting to reflect his thoughts, slowly becoming more and more erratic over time.

The feelings enveloping him from within could be described with a single word—Unpleasant.

The more Ainz thought about the purpose behind this visit to the

Empire, which had been planned by Demiurge, the more he frowned, despite the face being an illusion.

For Ainz Ooal Gown, the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the word "endure" should not be in his vocabulary. There should be no need to suppress his emotions. Ainz's words should be absolute, where white would become black if he declared so. There was no reason for things to be otherwise.

Yet the current situation still ended up this way because Ainz couldn't find a valid excuse to dismiss Demiurge's proposal.

The overall objective was—showcasing the strength of Nazarick. It was very easy to understand Demiurge's plan, and the results would also be immediate. On the other hand, what Ainz didn't like was that it felt as if he was about to throw mud on the things carefully built by his past comrades.

However, to reject such an amazingly thought out plan just because of his personal emotions would be a shame. Also, Ainz didn't want others to think that he lacked the magnanimity to accept proposals made by another individual.

To dismiss the current plan without suggesting any alternatives was something that Ainz, not as the supreme ruler but as a member of society, felt was unacceptable.

Ainz repeated the things he thought previously once more in order to calm down. There was a need to cool his head. Between logic and emotions, choosing to go with logic should be the correct choice. Even though those who were driven by their emotions would sometimes achieve extraordinary results, most of the time they were simply irrational. Not only that...

"...It's simply too late to back out now! Kaaa!"

Ainz inhaled and exhaled deeply using his non-existent lungs. And showed no concerns to the city guards and townspeople that cast odd glances in his direction as they walked by.

Due to Ainz's naturally tall and awe-inspiring figure, he was already the center of attention. This became even more so after he was exalted as a hero. Not attracting any attention would be strange. Because of this, Ainz had gotten used to ignoring people's gaze, even more so after he started riding Hamusuke.

After taking multiple deep breaths, Ainz was finally able to reduce the feeling of unpleasantness to a minimum. Only then did he notice the amount of effort that his subordinate, Narberal, had to make in order to keep up with him.

"My bad, I might have walked a bit too fast."

The walking pace required in order to cover the same amount of distance between the footsteps of a man wearing full body armor such as Ainz and the robe wearing Narberal was completely different. It wasn't hard for Narberal to keep up due to her physical capabilities, but as a man, there was still a need to apologize for not being considerate of his walking pace.

"No, I do not have any complaints."

"Is that so..."

Ainz couldn't figure out whether the reply was a typical response that servants gave their masters or if Narberal really didn't mind. While slowing down his pace, Ainz searched for a topic to discuss.

Ainz felt somewhat embarrassed for the unapproachable atmosphere he had been radiating moments ago. As such, in an attempt to improve the current awkward mood, Ainz desperately tried to think of a topic to discuss. However, nothing good came to mind.

He thought about meaningless conversation starters that salespeople often used, such as talking about the weather. Talking about sports was also a good choice, but one had to find out which teams the other person rooted for first.

Considering whether or not to start that kind of conversation, Ainz

started mumbling deep in his heart.

Why do I need to be this considerate to someone like Narberal, who is just a subordinate? Well, since it turned out this way, I might as well use this opportunity to practice master-servant dialogue. That being said, it must befit the status of a ruler. What do people with absolute power talk about with their subordinates/servants?

Thinking back on the everyday conversations that took place in Ainz's old company, something like that should be fine, right?

Ainz was the supreme overlord of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, not some senior executive of a company. If a comparison had to be made, he would be more like a company president or a CEO.

No, it's still a bit different from a president... Speaking of which, what's the conversation like between the King and Gazef Stronoff? It would be useful as a reference.

Even if that was the case, they had already gotten to this point. If they went on like this, the mood between them would end up too heavy to bear. Ainz ended up forcefully opening his mouth.

"...Narberal ...What do you think of this voice?"

Ainz pointed to his voice box, or more accurately, pointed to the place where his vocal cords should be. He pressed down on the area where his throat should have been with his gauntlets. He expected only the metallic sensation of his gauntlets, however, there was an elastic feeling, giving out an uncanny impression that his throat really existed.

"Truthfully, I don't think this voice is good. Although it doesn't sound strange, I still think the usual voice of Momon-sa...san sounds better. While I understand there is a reason behind doing this, I admit preferring to hear your old voice."

"Is that so? I quite like this voice... Neuronist selected it from amongst fifty people. There's an indescribable charm to it."

Suddenly, thinking back to the time when Ainz listened to a recording of his voice, he quietly muttered something and calmed the sudden turmoil in his head.

"Is that so? However, I still think Momon-san's original voice sounded better."

"I am grateful to hear that, Narberal. Speaking of which, I had no idea that I could also equip this..."

Unsure whether Narberal's response was merely courtesy or her real thoughts, Ainz once more reached towards his neck, feeling the creature that was attached to his throat—the Lip Bug—wriggling.

Normal people would definitely find it itchy.

Is it that I simply didn't know, or did the rules somehow change? Lacking information on these kind of things could also pose certain dangers in the future. Not only about this world, but the knowledge from YGGDRASIL also needs to be relearned.

The game YGGDRASIL was designed with the intention of letting players enjoy exploring the unknown. Because of this, there was a need to test a variety of different things, which resulted in the development company investing huge amounts of resources to in order to create the system.

As such, the players were able to encounter a completely unknown world.

Not even mentioning the lack of information on the maps given at the start, dungeon related knowledge as well as information on mining, cooking, monster breeding e.t.c... everything was unknown to the players. It was the kind of world where players were forced to discover things for themselves. To make it clearer, even things such as what could be equipped and what couldn't required the trial and error of the players themselves.

Although there were raid and information websites, the data posted

on these sites was already well known, or information that simply wasn't credible. YGGDRASIL was a game designed for its players to explore. Gaining knowledge was like finding treasure. There was no benefit in informing other players for free.

Hence, the only information that could be trusted came from within one's own guild, or from trades made with other reliable guilds. Everything else was simply useless third-rate information.

There was also a period where the forums were flooded with suspicious threads that began with "I'm planning on leaving my guild, so I will release all their information".

Well, there was most likely some real information released amongst those…

There once existed a guild called "Three Burning Eyes".

It was formed by the owners of a site which charged its members a fee each time for accessing information, and specialized in sending spies to join other, higher-ranking guilds in order to steal information and other such dubious acts. The Gaming Administration did not punish such deeds and it was quietly accepted as a means of acquiring intelligence. However, the guilds who had been stolen from were much less forgiving.

What happened was that those guilds formed an alliance and attacked "Three Burning Eyes". After capturing the respawn point inside the guild's base and the respawn points of the temple in the surrounding streets, the alliance began to PK the guild members from "Three Burning Eyes", and when they resurrected, PKed them again, not letting even a single one go. They kept this up until "Three Burning Eyes" disbanded and all its members scattered.

And in the end, the most memorable part was when they made their information site free to access. How nostalgic, Ainz thought.

Well, there were definitely no spies in Ainz Ooal Gown... However, if it wasn't for that incident, maybe we would have had more members…

Because of that incident, the recruitment process for Ainz Ooal Gown had been halted, and the guild was formed with 41 members, which was the minimum number required for a guild to be considered as high tier.

During the final years of YGGDRASIL, the chances of reliable information being made public on the web was rather high. However, the only time that Ainz really focused his attention on information sites was during the golden period where "Ainz Ooal Gown" was at its peak. The amount of useful information was really limited at that time.

My knowledge of the game most likely peaked at that time. Although I still paid attention to the announcements made by the Game Administration... this world likely contains YGGDRASIL players apart from myself, thus I need to also consider the risk posed from having less knowledge than them.

Through the captured members of Eight Fingers, Nazarick was able to acquire lots of useful intelligence. However, that information largely pertained to the Kingdom and the Empire. There was very little regarding the Theocracy, the Holy Kingdom and the Republic. There was a need to further improve intelligence gathering.

"What a pain, I thought so much about it, but in the end I still feel troubled. It's time to switch to a more light hearted topic."

In order to change the conversation, Ainz mildly looked around his surroundings.

"Speaking of which, the Empire seems quite lively."

"Is that so? I felt the same way in E-Rantel."

In response to Narberal's words, Ainz glanced around once more.

"The streets are full of life and the people’s eyes are bright. It's a sign that people believe they're living well."

Although Narberal responded from behind with "As expected of Momon-san", Ainz was a bit embarrassed by his own words and didn't reply. It was only a slight feeling that Ainz had about the people on the streets, and whether it was true or not, Ainz still did not have confidence in what his eyes saw.

It's not as though I was following Pandora's Actor's lead... "it's a sign of something". To think I could say these words out loud without shame... It's like I've turned into a poet or something.

Because he had been expected to act like a hero back in the royal capital, Ainz had gotten into a hero's mindset, and it was apparently starting to become a habit.

The face beneath Ainz's helmet showed an expression of slight embarrassment—of course it was impossible for a skull to turn red—and then Ainz saw the hotel Fluder had described to him.

Even from a distance, one could tell that the imperial capital's best hotel was far more luxurious than its counterpart in E-Rantel. That was one way of describing it, but that impression was only based on the level of facilities and the difference in style. One could say the high-class hotels of the Kingdom were steeped in history while those of the Empire were recently-opened, and if you asked which was better, everyone would have different opinions.

"I'm not sure about going in, but the atmosphere does seem pretty nice."

Ainz gently touched the adamantite plate that hung in front of his chest and headed towards the entrance.

Similar to E-Rantel, athletic soldiers in leather armor were standing guard at the entrances and exits. As Ainz and Narberal approached, the guards turned questioning glances to them. However, after focusing on a single point, they hurriedly looked away with wide eyes.

"A-Are they the real deal? I think they are the real deal, judging from

the equipment they have... "

Hearing the whispers that came from his comrade, the other security guard tried his best to stand still and hide his nervousness. However, as they closed the distance, his tension was obvious, but he was nonetheless capable of speaking politely.

"My apologies, adamantite-rank adventurer-sama. I'm very sorry for the inconvenience, but may I please see your identification?"

As Ainz handed over his plate and asked, "Does this hotel only accept members?"

"Yes, in order to maintain the reputation of this hotel, we only accept regular members or those with referrals. However, adamantite-rank adventurers are an exception to that rule."

Wiping both hands with his sleeves, the other security guard carefully took the identification plate that Ainz handed over as if he was afraid of breaking it. Turning it over, he read out the words carved on the back.

"Darkness'… Momon-sama?"

"That's right."

"Verification complete! Thank you for giving me the chance to hold an Adamantite plate!"

His attitude when returning the plate was still as careful as before. The plate that served as proof of an adventurer's status was made using the same type of metal that corresponded to the rank of the adventurer. Even though the plate was fairly small, the cost of making an adamantite plate was astronomical. While the plate might be extremely hard to break, the possibility of accidentally losing it was still there. For someone like the security guard of a hotel, the thought of having to compensate for the loss of an adamantite plate was simply unbearable. The security guards had heard of many stories where adamantite plates had being lost before. Such as when

trying to return the plate, a Crane-Parrot—a type of bird—would fly by and snatch it up. Stories like these weren't told to make people pay more attention, but were actual events which had happened before.

A look of relief bloomed across the faces of the two security guards once Ainz took back his identification plate.

"Now then, may we enter?"

"Yes, Momon-sama. Please allow me to lead the way."

"Is that so? We'll be under your care then."

Tipping wasn't a thing in the Kingdom. Hopefully it was the same in the Empire. Ainz couldn't help but think about these kinds of things while being shown in.

After walking through a spacious lobby with marble-like floor tiles, they reached the reception counter.

"Announcing the arrival of the adamantite-ranked adventurer Momon-sama and company."

Sitting behind the reception counter was a man with the appearance of having received a proper upbringing. After being acknowledged, the guard turned towards Ainz and bowed respectfully before heading back to his post.

"Welcome, Momon-sama. For choosing to grace us with your presence during your visit to the Empire, I wish to express our very deep gratitude."

The receptionist bowed deeply towards Ainz.

"No, please don't worry about it, for now I wish to stay for one night."

"Understood. To begin, please sign here at the guest register."

Ainz smiled underneath his helmet. Having practiced writing down his name using the language of the Kingdom countless times, he flawlessly signed the paper after picking up a pen.

"Thank you very much. Now what kind of room would you prefer?"

For Ainz, all rooms were the same whether they were cheap or luxurious. However, as usual, he had an appearance to maintain.

It's not like I have a need to eat food, even if the accommodation didn't include complimentary meal I'd be fine with it.

Ainz suddenly thought about the foods that existed in this world.

A green-colored juice which smelled irresistibly sweet and delicious, a pink-colored food that looked like scrambled egg, carefully sliced cooked meat covered in a bluish liquid which made the meat look more tender and juicy. Every one of those mentioned dishes stimulated Ainz's curiosity, but unfortunately he wasn't able to eat them.

...Libido, appetite, and the desire for sleep. Despite the numerous benefits of having an undead body, many other important things were lost. How unfortunate. But on the other hand, the possibility of becoming immersed in bodily desires would be too high if I regained my human body.

Having imagined being in bed with Albedo, Ainz ended up tilting his head.

A boss that sexually harasses female employees—that was the image that appeared last in Ainz's head after his earlier imagination.

Even though Albedo proclaimed her love to me... how complicated. If only I didn't mess with the... oh!

"Sorry for the delay. Any room that is fitting of our status would do. ...By the way, is it fine for us to pay using the Kingdom's currency?"

"That is not a problem. The exchange rate is one to one to begin with."

"Is that so? I will leave it in your hands then."

"Certainly. I shall begin preparing a room suitable for Momon-sama. In the meantime, please take a rest in our lounge."

Ainz saw that the arrangement of the chairs in the lounge were separated into small groups where the distance between each group was quite far apart. More than fifty seats luxurious enough for high ranking officials were available. Just the appearance alone made the chairs seem extremely comfortable. There were even minstrels softly playing music in the background.

"Everything in the lounge, including food and drinks, are complimentary services, please put yourself at ease and enjoy them."

In any world, as long as a certain amount of money was put in, corresponding amount of service would be returned. Even so, the services being returned here did not please Ainz at all.

"Understood. Come, Nabe."

Ainz entered the lounge with Narberal and chose the nearest chairs to sit down on.

There were a few other guests also resting in the lounge. The majority of them were adventurers. If high ranking adventurers could complete quests that paid generous rewards, their living standard would naturally increase as well and they could afford to live in hotels like this.

Regardless of where they were, be it the Kingdom capital or E-Rantel, all adventurers led the same lifestyle.

Ainz made sure that the adamantite plate hanging around his neck was visible for the others to see, so that they would become the topic of conversation amongst the guests at the hotel. It wasn't a bad thing

to raise one's profile through this method.

While being conscious of the attention he was getting, Ainz opened the menu that was next to him.

Can't read it…

Ainz slowly flicked through the menu, even though he couldn't read, to prevent others from finding out.

Even though Ainz brought along the item that had previously been lent to Sebas which allowed one to read any language, in the current situation, it would be weird to suddenly take it out and use it.

"Sebas… and Tsuare..."

The image of Sebas along with Tsuare popped up in Ainz's mind when thinking about whether or not to use the item.

"Is something wrong with that woman?"

"Ah, no, it's not a big deal. I was wondering about how she is adjusting."

Although Ainz had handed everything to Sebas, he still had the obligation to ensure Tsuare's wellbeing since he made the promise to protect her.

"I don't think there's any problem. At the moment... because the head maid is currently under house arrest, Sebas-sama is personally teaching her the skills needed as a maid. After she has learned an adequate amount of proper etiquette, she will then study cooking and a few other types of work. We plan on teaching her a bit of everything until we discover what work she is most suitable for."

"Is that so? Well then, it should be fine leaving it to Sebas. Also, it's about time to release those two from house arrest… Albedo's temper should have cooled off by now."

Narberal lowered her head without saying a word.

Noticing that their conversation had ended, a waiter quietly walked towards them.

"Have the two of you decided on what to order?"

"I'll have iced Makyatia. What do you want, Nabe?"

"I want the same."

"It's okay to order something that you like."

"No, I want to have the same drink. Oh, and also, I want milk to be added to mine."

"Certainly."

Having received the orders, the waiter bowed deeply, and left quietly.

Makyatia was a drink that looked similar to latte, and Ainz often saw it in E-Rantel. It smelled like latte as well. However, since latte and coffee also existed in this world there must be some difference. Nevertheless, Ainz would never find out because he could not consume any food or drinks. He had previously experimented by attempting to eat and drink, but the only results were that everything spilled out from below his chin without tasting anything. Not a single benefit was found.

The reason why Ainz chose this drink was because it was only served in high-class establishments. It was probably the most suitable choice for the current setting.

While wiping away non-existent sweat, Ainz thought of the most pointless question to ask.

"Nabe... what does Makyatia taste like?"

Knowing that Narberal had tried the drink before, Ainz curiously asked her.

Narberal made an expression that showed that she was thinking. It was the kind of expression one would make such as when being asked what does coffee tastes like by someone who has never tried it once in their life.

"Hmmm... If I had to describe it, I would say it tastes similar to Shakerato. Except it leaves behind an aftertaste of condensed milk."

"...Is that so? Sounds delicious."

Never heard of a drink called Shakerato before. Is this perhaps a type of drink that only exists in this world? The possibility of that seems high.

"It's not bad. Only so-so." Narberal replied.

Just as Ainz responded to Narberal with a "Hmmm", the drinks that were ordered arrived.

"Don't mind me and drink up. Otherwise it'll be weird if neither of us touched our drinks."

Having becoming accustomed to wearing his helmet all day long, Ainz did not notice the unnaturalness of not removing his helmet despite drinks being served in front of him.

"Thank you."

"It's fine if you drink mine as well. Anyway, listen up. For the time being, the plan is to first tour the capital in the next two days. I've heard that the amount of goods they sell at the central market is unbelievable. It's definitely worth taking a look. Also, they sell magic items in the center area of the northern market and adventurers frequent that place."

This information was acquired from the captured members of "Eight

Fingers". Although most of the reports received were related to the black markets, Ainz didn't have any plans on visiting them. He only knew of it from glancing at the reports provided.

"The third day is to visit the Adventurer's Guild. If possible, I would like to make connections with some of the adamantite adventurers of the Empire, if not, then let's simply complete our current tasks and head home. Overall it should take around seven days. Do you have any other suggestions?"

Narberal, who stopped drinking halfway, listened in silence and shook her head.

Part 2

The capital of the Empire, often regarded as the manifestation of the Empire's power, contained many aspects which surprised people. One of them was something which the majority of travelers that arrived at the capital were amazed of—that every road in the capital was covered by bricks and stones.

Amongst the surrounding countries—even within the technologically more advanced Theocracy—the thought of having to cover the roads of an entire city in stones would make most cower. Of course it wasn't possible to do the same for every city within the Empire, but the fact that the capital of the Empire was capable of achieving this further reinforced its might. It was something which often made the diplomats from other countries sigh.

Especially the design of the roads; when one walked on them, one would immediately be able to appreciate their elegance and practicality.

Unlike the typical roads seen elsewhere, the roads in the capital were segregated into separate lanes where the ones in the center were the driveways for carriages and the lanes on the two sides were the

sidewalks for pedestrians.

To ensure safety, the sidewalks were raised higher from the ground and were protected by a fence. At night, street lights which were placed in sets on the side of the roads lit up, powered by magic. Furthermore, platoons of knights regularly patrolled the streets to ensure the peace.

On one of these roads within the Empire's capital, a young man could be seen humming and smiling as he strolled leisurely on the sidewalk. The man was maybe 170 cm in height, and looked around twenty years old. With blonde hair, blue eyes, and a healthy skin color that suggested he had regularly been exposed to sunlight, the man's features could only be described as common throughout the Empire.

He was not the pretty boy type. If put in a group of ten people, the man would definitely not stand out. However, an indescribable charm radiated from him which seemed to attract other people. It might be because of the invigorating smile on his face, or his confident way of walking.

With every step he took, a metallic jingling which sounded like it was caused by the friction of chains could be heard from beneath his. Knowledgeable observers would realise that it was the noise made from wearing chainmail.

Two swords hung from his waist. From their length, they seemed to be short swords. Parts of the handles were completely covered by the hand guard, with the blades hidden in the sheaths. One could tell that they were definitely not cheap. And finally, a mace and a yoroidoshi[1] were stored behind his waist.

Possessing two weapons was considered normal for this world. However, it was quite uncommon to see someone with weapons which could be used to slash, pierce, and make bludgeoning attacks.

To an average person, the man would seem like an adventurer. However, the well-informed ones would be able to tell that he was a worker simply from the fact that adventurers were required to wear

metallic plates around their necks.

Worker. This word was used to describe people who left the career path of an Adventurer.

The work given to adventurers was directly provided by the Adventurer's Guild, where the content and difficulty of the tasks were thoroughly investigated beforehand. Only the ones that were deemed suitable were assigned to adventurers and had corresponding ranks according to the difficulty of the task. In other words, work that were deemed inappropriate such as ones that might endanger the safety of the public, or the law-breaking kind of work like investigating the plant materials used in the creation of narcotics. Those kind of requests would be instantly rejected by the Adventurer's Guild.

Also, work that might damage the ecological balance of an area was also rejected. For example, the Adventurer's Guild would never issue requests involving the removal of monsters that play certain roles in an ecosystem. This was due to fear that the removal of the monster might trigger the collapse of the ecological balance in an area, which might result in hordes of other monsters leaving their habitats and causing damage to human settlements. However, if said monster left its habitat by itself and entered human territory, it would be treated as a separate matter entirely.

In other words, adventurers were friends of justice.

However, the world did not operate on that principle alone.

Regardless of how one described things, there were people who were willing to take on high-risk work simply for the reward. There also existed the kind of people that simply enjoyed slaying monsters.

These people, when compared against the adventurers that stood in the light, preferred to stay in the darkness. The "dropouts" amongst the adventurers. That was what some people called them.

However, not all workers were the kind of people that were previously mentioned.

Hypothetically speaking, if a young village boy was heavily injured and an adventurer group that was capable of performing healing magic happened to pass by, were they allowed to cast the spells to save the boy?

The answer was no.

There was a rule that strictly forbade adventurers from using healing magic on the common people unless a certain fee was paid to the adventurers.

This was because the common usage of healing magic was restricted by the temples, where patients were required to come to the temples and pay a certain fee in order to receive healing. If the adventurers ignored this system and freely went around healing people, the temples would become unable to feed themselves.

For this reason, the temples had strongly pressured the Adventurer's Guild into enforcing this regulation.

If adventurers were unable to obey the rules, then they could opt to become a worker.

Although this made the temples seem like the bad guys, this was not without good reason. Due to the influence of magic on the daily lives of people, magic could be considered as another political tool for power. In order for the temples to provide benefits to the people without becoming controlled by politics, the only source of income they could receive would be from the people. In exchange, the temples provided healing, cleansing of the undead, as well as researching and developing new healing spells.

If the adventurers ignored the regulations and used their healing spells freely, the temples would be forced to become more secular, and their initial ideologies would become corrupted.

As such, there were always two sides to a story. Without light, there would be no shadow. The existence of workers could be described in the same way. For money, they were willing to ignore regulations

and often make a mess of things, however, there were also cases where they had brought benefits to the people, such as the creation of cheaper medicine.

Having said that, this was the kind of profession this man had—Hekkeran Termite.

"Hmm... what to buy?"

There were simply too many magical items Hekkeran wanted. For the time being, he should probably focus on defensive items first. After that, there was one more that he wanted due to special reasons.

"First I should deposit the money... the rest will be used to buy the magic items needed for adventuring. Eh? Got the order wrong. First buy the items, and then deposit the rest."

Hekkeran scratched his head.

If it's like that—

"As the vanguard, I need to have more magic resistance, maybe it's time for me to take out my savings as well. No, if for some reason I still need to rely on subjugating undead from Kattse Plains to make a living, it might be better for me to buy items which make me more resistant to poison, paralysis and sickness."

Magic items were highly valued in this world. Especially the ones that were useful during battle were highly sought after by adventurers. If it was a first-rate item, then he would simply give up on buying it.

For the time being, the items on his mind were not the extremely expensive ones. However, it would still require years of saving in order for an average person to purchase them. That was why he was taking his time to properly think things through.

His relaxed face, which couldn't contain the smile behind his excitement suddenly became tense the moment he sighted a group of

knights currently standing by the side of the road.

The group composed of light and heavy-armored knights were standing guard at a road junction. Due to the Temple of the Four Great Gods being in the vicinity, the amount of patrols in this area was considerably high. Although these knights wouldn't just suddenly start questioning normal people who were simply passing by, Hekkeran could still feel the gaze of the knights gathering on the weapons that he was carrying.

It might be alright for adventurers, but for workers like Hekkeran that had no backing from any organizations or persons of influence, it simply wasn't wise to get into conflicts with knights tasked with protecting the Empire.

As he had hoped, Hekkeran walked by without incident. After checking his face with the list of wanted criminals and not finding any match, the knights made no further movement.

Having made past the territory of the temple, he finally relaxed and set his sights further ahead. A huge building came into view, and along with it, the sound of cheering, battle and the thirst for blood.

That unique building was the Grand Arena, which only existed in the capital of the Empire. It was also one of the most iconic buildings in the capital.

For Hekkeran, who had seen enough blood spilled during work and had no interest in gambling, the arena was a place which held no meaning to him. However, to the populace of the capital it was one of their most important sources of entertainment. Even from where he was walking, the cheering could be heard. It seemed the arena was completely packed today as well.

"Is it the finals? The excitement is really high."

In the past, Hekkeran had brought his worker team to the arena, where they had to fight continuous hordes of monsters. Because monsters did not accept surrenders, losing would result in death. Of

course, it wasn't like casualties didn't occur during battle between humans.

On a typical day in the arena, it was very rare to not see a single person die. If something like that did actually happen, the pressure exerted by the audience was strong enough to kill someone, since the events with many deaths were very popular.

Among these events, the one with the highest casualty rate was therefore the most popular one, the Grand Combat Tournament.

Hekkeran shrugged.

He had absolutely no interest in seeing such bloodthirsty scenes taking place, and had no desire to visit that place. However, events that happened in the arena were hot topics that people often talked about, so there were always reasons to go.

I'm not planning on entering today, but when I get back I should probably ask for the highlights. It seems like the matches that took place today are quite exciting.

While trying to memorize the plans that he made, Hekkeran started walking towards an area that contained variety of shops. Soon after, he saw the familiar sign which said "The Singing Apple Pavilion".

The shop was said to have started with the gathering of bards who built their instruments using the wood of apple trees, but now it was a bar and an inn. From outside, the shop seemed a bit outdated, but the interior was surprisingly tidy and in good condition. It kept the cold out. The floor was kept well polished. The quality of the shop was actually quite high but not overly expensive. To Hekkeran and his comrades, no in fact, to the majority of the workers, this shop was regarded as the best inn without a doubt.

Although it can't be compared to the top-class hotels in the Empire, those type of hotels were better suited to the adventurers who stood on the public stage.

Firstly, the work given to the workers usually required discretion. Eye-catching hotels in public places weren't convenient at all for the kinds of people that required the services of workers. But at the same time, they couldn't always meet in shady locations and conduct their business there.

Next would be the need for multiple teams of workers to stay in the same spot at the same time. Therefore inns like "The Singing Apple Pavilion", which were much more discreet and where guests could discuss things in private, were ideal locations that met the clients' needs. Due to the fact that workers did not have the support of an organization like the Adventurer's Guild, the clients were required to search for worker teams themselves. It would be very troublesome for everyone if the workers stayed in different places.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the workers, staying near each other brought about a sense of camaraderie, as well as the benefit of avoiding conflicting jobs that would cause unnecessary bloodshed. And last but not least—which would also be the most important reason—the food here was really nice.

While thinking about tonight's dinner, Hekkeran opened the door to the inns. If it was his favorite pork stew, he would be very happy. Having these kind of thoughts as he entered, the words that he heard were not the typical "Welcome back" or "Good work" which he expected but

"—I've already said! I don't know!"

"No, no, even if you say that..."

"It's not like I‘m that girl's guardian or her relative. It's impossible for me to tell you where she is."

"Aren't you comrades? I can't simply take ‘I don't know' as an answer and leave. This is my job after all."

On the first floor of the inn, in the center of the dining area, a man and a woman stared at each other.

Hekkeran knew that woman well.

Though her eyes radiated an intense ferocity, the feature that stood out the most were the pair of ears which were far longer than those of a normal human. That said, her ears were still only about half as long as those of typical elves. That's right, her race was half-elf.

Elves tended to be slimmer when compared with humans. It seemed like the woman here had also inherited this trait. Her whole body was very slim. Be it the area around her chest or her waist, there were no visible curves on her body. She was as flat as a board. From afar, it wouldn't be surprising if people mistook her for a man.

Clad in neat leather armor, without the typical bow and arrow on her, the only weapon she had right now was the short dagger on her waist.

Her name was Imina, and she was one of Hekkeran's comrades.

However, Hekkeran was unfamiliar with the man currently arguing with Imina.

Although he appeared to be groveling in front of Imina by lowering his head, not a single shred of sincerity could be seen in his eyes. In fact, the feeling present there was disgust. At least for now, it appeared that he was trying to keep things civil.

The man's arms and chest were packed with muscles. His appearance alone could force anyone standing in front of him to give him what he wanted. While he didn't seem like the type of person who relied on violence to get things done, Imina was still capable of handling him if he did.

Even though Imina didn't appear to be very strong, deep in her body dwelled a strength that was enough to take care of thugs who only relied on their muscles.

"Didn't I already say so from the very beginning?"

Noticing that Imina's voice was starting to become strained with emotion, Hekkeran hurriedly interjected.

"What's wrong, Imina?"

Hearing the sound of a familiar voice, Imina turned her head and was surprised when seeing Hekkeran.

For a ranger like Imina, who excelled in perception and awareness of her surroundings, not noticing Hekkeran's approach showed just how distracted she had been earlier.

"...Who the heck are you?" asked the man who was viewed as an intruder by Hekkeran.

Having met his gaze, Hekkeran felt that the atmosphere between them was on the verge of coming to blows. However, for someone like Hekkeran, who had survived countless life and death situations, the gaze was nothing compared to the intense stares of ferocious monsters.

"...That's our team's leader."

"...Oooh, so this is the renowned Hekkeran Termite-san."

Hekkeran was disgusted by the sudden change of attitude.

Even though Hekkeran didn't knew the purpose behind the man's visit, if he came all the way to what was considered by Hekkeran's team to be their stronghold—the inn—the chances of him not recognizing Hekkeran were non-existent.

Perhaps the harshness in the argument from before was to measure the extent of what Hekkeran was capable of. If Hekkeran displayed even a slightest hint of weakness, the man probably would have proceeded to use intimidation next.

Amongst workers or adventurers, there were always those who were

capable of slaying monsters but rather timid towards humans. Even then, the most they would do would be to take a step back, but if things were pushed too far, it would definitely end in a bloodbath.

Even though we just met, he's already like this... This guy... is definitely the type I can't stand.

While it was true that this was one of the commonly used methods for negotiation, it was a method Hekkeran didn't like. He would much more prefer it if the other party got directly to the point instead of going about in circles.

"...Could you be a little quieter, please? This is an inn, and you're disturbing other guests. I'd be much happier if you could do that."

Although he was saying that, not a single guest could be seen nearby. Just where did all the people go? It wasn't as though they hid themselves away, the guests of this inn were already quite used to this kind of talk because the majority of them were also workers in the first place.

However, it was truly a rare occurrence for this place to be devoid of people.

Hekkeran glared at the man using a strength on par with mithril-ranked adventurers. As though confronted by a monster, the man wilted.

"I-I… I'm very sorry. I did not intend to do that initially."

After managing to calm his voice down, the man attempted to speak once more. However, he instantly became quiet again when he saw Hekkeran's glare. Judging from his reaction, it was clear that the man was used to this kind of work, where violence was a common occurrence.

What's a guy like this doing in here?

Although the type of work that Hekkeran's team did was under-the-

table business, he didn't recognize this man, and Hekkeran had no idea why he had been sent here. He simply didn't fit the profile of someone who came bearing requests.

It bothered Hekkeran, and he ended up weakening his gaze and asked the man directly.

"...Just why on Earth are you here?"

"About that, I'm looking for a person that Termite-san also knows, Furt-san."

Hearing the name Furt, the image of a person appeared in Hekkeran's mind.

Even so, was hard to imagine that she would have any connections with this man. That was Hekkeran's conclusion.

"Arche? Did something happen to her?"

"Arche... Ah! That's why. I got confused just then, but we're both talking about Furt-san here, Arche Eeb Rile Furt-san."

"And!? Did something happen to Arche?"

"No, no, I only wish to discuss something with her... The content of the discussion is private, that's why I wanted to know when she would return."

"As if I would know that." Hekkeran replied sharply.

For someone who was never direct when speaking, the man was briefly stunned by Hekkeran's words.

"If that's the case, the conversation is over."

"I-It can't be helped then. If that's the case, I'll have to wait here."

"Get lost."

Hekkeran gestured to the entrance of the inn with his chin. Hekkeran's attitude shut the other man up once more.

"I will make it clear, I don't like you at all. I simply can't tolerate guys like you within my sight."

"But this is the tavern area, I should be able to..."

"Ah, that's right, isn't it? This area is indeed the tavern. But don't forget this is also the place where drunks get into fights," Hekkeran smiled at the man. "But you don't have to worry. Relax, even if you become gravely injured, we have a priest here who's capable of using healing magic to heal you. As long as you pay the right price, that is."

"It can't be helped that we have to charge you extra. Otherwise the temples would become very annoyed. We definitely don't want to attract any assassins sent by the temples," said Imina. A grin was visible on her face. "Well, at the least we'll give you a discount. Remember to thank me for that, won't you?"

"—And that's what's going to happen."

"If you plan on threa—"

The words coming from the man halted midway, because he saw the dramatic change on Hekkeran's face.

Hekkeran took a step forward, all the way until the distance between their faces was a fist away.

"Hah?! Threats? Who's making threats? Is it such a big surprise that bars have fights? What the hell, I give you good advice for living a long and healthy life and you say I'm making threats? Are you trying to start a fight?"

Hekkeran's current appearance was something only people who had

faced death could possess.

Confronted with the pressure coming from Hekkeran, the man took a step back. He clicked his tongue for a bit and then reluctantly walked towards the entrance. Although he wanted to hide the fact that he was frightened, one look at his back was all it took to confirm it. As he reached the entrance, the man turned his and shouted at Hekkeran and Imina one last time.

"Tell that brat from the Furt family! Tell her the deadline is approaching!"

"Hah?!"

Hearing the iron in Hekkeran's reply, the man quickly scurried away.

As soon as the man disappeared, Hekkeran's expression quickly returned to normal. The change was sudden enough that onlookers might have thought that the entire scene had been nothing but an act. And then, Imina started clapping, as though he had really pulled off a great performance.

"So, what that all about?"

"I don't know. He only told me as much as he told you."

"Damn, I should have listened more before getting rid of him."

Hekkeran held his head in defeat.

"Just wait and hear it from Arche once she gets back."

"...But, it isn't good to pry too deeply into things."

"Well, even though what you said is correct, you're still the leader. Do your best!"

"In that case, I will use my authority as the leader to order you to ask

her about it. It would be much better if a fellow woman like you were to ask her about it, don't you think?"

"Come on, give me a break, I don't want to ask either."

The two of them smiled bitterly at each other.

There were a few rules in common between adventurers and workers, where certain things were simply not done. The first would be to uncover a teammate's past. The second would be to display excessive desire.

In the case of the second rule, to some extent, excessive desire was unavoidable due to the fact that many people chose to be workers for personal gains. However, even that had a limit. Too much desire could cause a team to lose its coherence. For example, it was difficult to trust teammates who were constantly grumbling about money. Letting teammates watch your back during dangerous moments was a fundamental part of teamwork and unity. As such, all teams needed a minimum level of trust between each other. But how much could you trust someone who was known to be greedy when you take on a high-risk, high-reward job?

Currently, it seemed like there were problems relating to Arche, which would affect her reliability. That simply wasn't a matter which could be easily overlooked.

During the course of their jobs, they would be putting their lives in each other's hands. As such they couldn't afford to have even a trace of doubt in their teammates.

Hekkeran shook his head, while displaying his reluctance on his face.

"Looks like it can't be helped, then. I'll have to ask when she comes back."

"I'm counting on you~."

Hekkeran narrowed his eyes at Imina, who was smiling and waving

her hand, and said, "Don't think you can get away. You also need to come talk to her with me, yo."

"Eh, ehhh..." Although Imina clearly wanted to refuse, she gave up as soon as she saw the determination on Hekkeran's face. "Oh well, it can't be helped. Hopefully it isn't anything big..."

"Anyway, where did Arche go?"

"Eh? Ah, she's gathering the information behind that job."

"Aren't Rob and I in charge of that?"

After returning from Kattse Plains, they received a new commission, with pretty good terms for the nature of the work concerned. As such, they began the preparations for taking the job.

Originally it should have been Roberdyck, who was best suited for this sort of thing, to research the background of the commissioner as well as the compensation. Hekkeran was to head to the Empire's Administrative office to collect the payment for their undead subjugation—all work related to eliminating undead on the Kattse Plains was treated as government work by the Empire—and at the same time, use alternative methods to gather similar information as Roberdyck.

Imina and Arche should have waited at the inn.

"It wasn't just that. Rob needed help investigating the history and conditions around the area of operations."

Hekkeran nodded his head, as a look of understanding dawned on him. Although Arche had dropped out of the Imperial Magic Academy, she probably still had some contacts there. She was probably more suited at gathering academic-related information and she could also visit the Magician's Guild to collect additional material.

"So that's why she went along. Rob is also quite knowledgeable, and

has connections to the temples. Anyway, how did it go?"

Hekkeran made a sound as he sat down into a chair, and spoke up.

"Although the request was only offered to workers, the content of the job isn't anything bad. The reason why they chose to hire workers this time around is probably because the location of the job is somewhere adventurers can't go. However, just like the client said before, it seems like they've made contact with other teams as well."

"Are we really working with other teams? Even if it is said that the ruins they discovered appear to be untouched, for them to be willing to invest this much without any definite gains seems a bit..."

That Greenham guy—from one of the other teams that were contacted—was saying the same thing. But in the end, 'Heavy Masher' seems to be planning to accept the request. If we don't decide by tomorrow, things might become troublesome."

So far Hekkeran's team had only listened to the contents of the request, and they had yet to accept it. Although they promised to give the client a reply by tomorrow, if they were going to accept, they would have to start preparing immediately.

"And then, at this important juncture something else comes up… Are the two somehow connected?"

"We can't rule out that it was done by another team that wanted to make a fortune with this, but I think we should still wait and listen to Arche's explanation before deciding. If it really is some scheme started by another team, do we back out or carry on?"

"Of course we continue. If they plan on starting a fight, then we just need to keep whacking them until none of them dares to mess with us again, ‘till we knock all their teeth out."

"That sounds quite excessive."

Although Imina seemed overly harsh on the outside, Hekkeran also

thought her approach to solving this problem was a good one.

While it wasn't too big of a deal to be looked down upon, their reputation would also drop if they backed out. Losing reputation was something that those in the worker profession wished to avoid.

At the same time a fiery determination burned within Hekkeran's eyes, a squeaky sound of doors opening came from the entrance. The figures of two people walked into the inn.

"—We're home!"

"We have returned!"

The first voice was somewhat whiny and belonged to a girl, followed shortly by the voice of a man whose eyes were filled with righteousness. The momentary pause came from the hesitancy of covering up the soft voice of his female companion.

The girl that first walked in was not too thin. The words “young beauty” would describe her the best.

With an appearance between fifteen to seventeen years old, the girl possessed a face with delicate features and shoulder long hair. Hers was an elegant beauty, but every now and then, she also gave the impression of being a lifeless doll.

Her hands grasped an iron staff that was around the same height as herself. The surface of the staff was covered with symbols and runes that could have been words or pictures. The girl wore a loose robe, and under that, sturdy clothes which offered quite a bit of protection. She was obviously a magic caster.

The man was wearing full body armor—although he had taken the helmet off—and over the armor was a surcoat embroidered with the symbol of a crest. A morningstar hung from his waist, and a necklace bearing the same crest as his surcoat laid around his neck.

With a neatly arranged hairstyle and a well-trimmed beard, the man

gave off a hearty impression. Appearance-wise, his age seemed to be around 30.

These two were the comrades that Hekkeran and Imina were waiting for, Arche Eeb Rile Furt and Roberdyck Goltron.

"Ooh, welcome back!"

Could this be described as good timing or bad timing? Hekkeran thought while turning around to greet the two with a hard voice

"What's wrong? Did something happen to the two of you?"

Roberdyck used a tone that did not display any seniority to the two of them. One of the reasons was due to personal choice, the other was because of the mutual equality between workers.

"Th-there's no problem."

"Tha-that's right. Just as Hekkeran said."

Arche and Roberdyck both watched as the two of them waved their hands in denial.

"Umm, speaking of which, this isn't a good place to talk, how about we go over there?"

Being done with joking around, a serious expression appeared on Hekkeran's face as he pointed towards a circular table at the back of the tavern area.

"Before that, err. About the drinks—Oi, Imina. Where did the owner go?"

"...Out shopping. I'm watching over the place for him."

"Is that so? Then what should we do? Is it fine for me to casually take out a bottle or two?"

"—I'm fine with not drinking."

"Ah, I'm also fine, thanks."

"...Is that so? In that case... then let's start the meeting of ‘Foresight'."

The relaxed expression on every member's face vanished. At the same time, they leaned their weight onto the table, bringing everyone closer together. Although there weren't any other guests at the moment, this sort of behavior had become an old habit that was hard to break.

"First, I would like to confirm the content of the commission."

Once he made sure that he had everyone's attention, Hekkeran continued. His tone and expression were completely different from before. As the leader of the team, it was necessary for him to act serious and maintain dignity when the situation called for it. That was only expected of a leader.

"The client this time is Earl Femel. The content of the request is to survey some ruins—most likely an underground tomb—discovered within the territory of the Kingdom. The compensation consists of a down payment of 200, followed by another 150 after completion. The quality of the contract and the total amount offered as reward is extremely high this time around. Not to mention that there's going to be a bonus at the end based on the results of the investigation. All magic items discovered during the investigation will belong to the Earl; however, the person that discovers them will receive an additional bonus of half the market price of the magic item. As for things like gems and precious metals, artworks and other treasures, after their value is verified, half the amount will be given to the discoverer. Also, they've made contact with other worker teams as well. Based on how events might unfold, it's most likely going to become a joint operation—alright, I think I've said enough."

After sharing the information he obtained with Arche and Roberdyck, Hekkeran returned to the content of the commission.

"The maximum duration is three days. The aim is mainly to explore the inside of the tomb. The important part to note is, it's suspected that we might encounter monsters during the investigation, but the type of monsters that we might encounter are currently unknown. From the looks of thing, this commission really seems to be just a simple investigation."

It was very common for monsters to use abandoned ruins at the outskirts of human civilisation as their lairs. As such, the "survey" tasks given to workers tend to be regarded as a reconnaissance by fire.

"The most important aspect about this commission is that it seems like the tomb is unexplored."

The moment that was said, the atmosphere surrounding the group changed.

Two hundred years ago, during the time of the Demon Gods' unrest, many kingdoms perished. It wasn't just human kingdoms that were destroyed, countries composed of demi-humans and other heteromorphic species perished as well. The ruins of these civilizations often contained many priceless treasures—the possibility of finding magic items was also high.

Finding these treasures was a dream shared by both adventurers and workers alike.

As such, unexplored ruins were something that adventurers and workers all wished to find. And suddenly, here it was, right in front of their eyes.

Having confirmed the excitement within the eyes of his comrades, Hekkeran passed the ball to the two that went out for intelligence gathering.

"Finally, the provisions required for the trip to and from the site will all be

covered by the Earl. That is all the information that I've gathered. Next, Arche, Roberdyck, tell us the findings of your investigation."

"—In that case, I'll start. Earl Femel's standing within the palace isn't very good. There are rumors that the Blood Emperor is giving him the cold shoulder. Also, from what I've gathered, it seems that he isn't in need of money."

"Regarding the ruins discovered within the territory of the Kingdom, both Arche-san and I have tried researching the past history of recorded civilizations. So far, we are unable to find any records of ancient cities being built near the site of the ruins. If it indeed is a tomb, we should have been able to find clues left behind in books... Truthfully speaking, I can't figure out why there would be a tomb built at that location. Only a few small villages exist near the area, perhaps it would be better to search for information there?"

"It can't be helped. We've been ordered to keep this operation has secret as possible. The client wishes for as few witnesses as possible, in other words, we shouldn't be making any unnecessary movements."

"—Of course, that region belongs to the Kingdom. If things gets exposed, we might end up becoming enemies of the Kingdom and the Vaiself family."

Exploring the ruins discovered in a different country, this kind of borderline illegal work was the reason why workers were selected instead of adventurers.

"So in other words, what we're doing is just plain old dirty work?"

"Although it can be seen that way, there's still a slight delicate issue."

"That's right. If the Empire's workers are caught inside the Kingdom, the Earl will definitely get dragged down along with us."

"Which brings us to the main question."

"Where did this information on the discovery of the ruin come from?"

"Yeah. No matter how I think about it, it's strange."

"Is that so? Isn't it fairly close to the Great Forest of Tob? Perhaps it was discovered during logging."

"—Weird. Take a look at this." Arche opened up the map and pointed towards a circular spot. "Although the details aren't very clear, but spots like this..." Sweeping her tiny finger along the map, Arche indicated their objective.

"—There's also a village here. However its size is really small. Perhaps it's better to describe it as a hamlet. I don't believe a village like that is capable of creating such large clearings within the forest."

"That's correct. The chances of these clearings being excavated by such a small village is highly unlikely. Especially if the forest is inhabited by many dangerous monsters... It's much more likely to think that it was done as a government project, but I can't see any reason why the Kingdom would want to excavate that part of the forest. In the end, we're still lacking information."

The four of them became more troubled after this. Should they accept the request or not?

Unlike adventurers, who had the backing of an entire guild, it was absolutely necessary for workers to properly investigate all details regarding the offered work before deciding. First, they had to thoroughly investigate the client's background and his connections, then the work location. Finally, based on the details gathered from the description of the job, a decision is made on whether or not to accept it.

Even after having done all of that, sometimes it still wasn't enough. If one wasn't capable of doing this, then they should quit being a worker. No matter how good the payment for the job might be, it would be better to reject it if you couldn't wash away the dirt that ended up staining your hands.

"...I've confirmed the payment already, this was given for the initial deposit—"

Hekkeran placed a metallic plate on top of the table. The surface of the plate was inscribed with countless different small glyphs and runes. Although he was given the plate, he would have to return it if they decided to reject the commission.

"I've already checked it with the Imperial Bank. The sum has already been credited to my account, it can be converted into cash any time."

The metallic plate was a type of guarantee that was used by banks within the Empire, in a similar role as a cheque.

In order to prevent counterfeits, the plates were made with great care and delicacy. Although it the creation process was extremely long, and would definitely incur additional fees for people to use, the advantages still far outweighed the drawbacks.

In other countries, this sort of thing was usually handled by the Adventurer's Guild; however the metallic plates used in the Empire were guaranteed by the government itself.

"From the looks of things, it doesn't seem like a trap... well, I knew they were dead serious the moment they paid the deposit."

If it was a trap, there shouldn't have been a need to pay such large deposit. However, it might just have been made to let people think this way, although Hekkeran didn't believe that he had somehow offended the nobleman enough to merit a trap specifically to target him.

"I—"

"Stop. Imina, I haven't finished yet. Please, keep your thoughts a little more flexible."

"Yes, yes. Let's hear them then. About this job that's offered to us... it seems that they're quite pressed for time, however, there are still

points I don't agree with. For example, hiring multiple worker teams, what do you make of this?"

Just as Imina pointed out, considering the amount of time it took to contact multiple teams, it would have made more sense to pick the first team that agreed and rush to the tomb's location, considering that jobs like this required great haste.

"—I'm not sure either. To begin with, I don't understand why they're trying to rush this. I also didn't receive any information on any emergency situations happening to the Earl. It's not as if there are any events or ceremonies coming up in the next few days. The only thing I can think of is that they're afraid the ruins might get discovered by the Kingdom. Hiring multiple teams might just be to raise the success rate?"

"About that, Hekkeran. Did you hear anything from Greenham?"

"There's not much to be said. I only went and asked if they were also contacted, but it seems that they were also coveting for information regarding this commission. It was hard enough not to reveal anything to them."

Hekkeran shrugged helplessly.

"—If that's the case, then perhaps there's a third party who's also aiming for the ruins?"

"That's definitely a possibility. If that's true then it would explain why so many workers are being hired. Oh that's right, it seems that something big happened recently in the Kingdom. However, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the area close to E-Rantel..."

"Let's hear more of this, Rob."

Due to the lack of accurate information, Roberdyck could only explain what he heard in bits and pieces. Since most of the details relating to the incident were pieced together from rumors, the overall picture that was painted at the end wasn't very clear or reliable.

"Hmm, we can't say for sure if the incident is related in any ways. However, I still think what Arche said is the most likely situation. Rob also agrees."

"If that's the case then… hiring multiple worker teams, and considering that the job location is within the territory of the Kingdom, is it possible that we're likely to end up clashing with Kingdom adventurers that were sent to explore the ruins? If it's like that then there's no point in collecting further information inside the Empire."

"The other thing to watch out for is an ambush made by the teams of other hired workers. I definitely don't want to lose my life just as we reach our goal."

"We also need to watch out for ambush made by adventurers. Although speaking of this, I'd much more prefer it if it was done by adventurers. At least we can try to negotiate with them and it wouldn't be as treacherous as one set by other workers."

"If it's done by workers, then things will most likely end in blood."

"—What should we do, leader?"

The overall issues had been raised and discussed, and each member's opinions had also been voiced. What was left were a few remaining speculations before coming to a conclusion.

"Before deciding, I have one thing to say... I think there's a need for everyone to hear this."

Hekkeran sighed deeply, and Imina, who sat beside Hekkeran, momentarily held her breath.

"Arche, a strange man came and said he wanted to see you."

Hearing this, an eyebrow went up on Arche's usually expressionless face. Seeing this reaction, Hekkeran understood that Arche knew the man.

"What did that guy say at the end? ...What was it again?"

Hekkeran blatantly asked Imina. What he received in return was a stare which said "what the heck are you saying?". However, after realizing that Hekkeran had really forgotten, Imina replied in a tired voice.

"'Tell the brat from the Furt family. Tell her the deadline is coming!'"

"Yep, something like that."

Being thrown into the spotlight, Arche took a deep breath and said with a heavy voice.

"—I'm in debt."

"Debt?!"

Hekkeran exclaimed in surprise. Of course, it wasn't just Hekkeran alone, Imina and Roberdyck also had shocked expressions. Since there were no ranks within their team, the income was shared equally. And thinking back on the amount they've earned so far, the notion of being in debt was ridiculous.

"How much do you owe?"

"—Three hundred gold coins." Hearing the reply from Arche, the three of them glanced at each other once more.

The amount that was owed was something that normal people wouldn't even be able to dream about. It was something that even workers of their level wouldn't be able to earn in one go. Although the deposit for their current given request was three hundred and fifty gold coins, that amount was for the entire team. After subtracting the cost of maintenance as well as buying necessary equipment and items, the amount left for each member was only around sixty gold coins.

Furthermore, their team was counted among the top of the worker profession. Using the same set of criteria as assessing adventurers, they would be equivalent to the mithril rank. Even at their level, they couldn't earn that much in a go. That showed just how much of a debt it was.

Arche’s face began to cloud up as she felt the doubtful gazes of her companions on her.

She naturally wanted to avoid this conversation. However, if she didn't answer it now, it wouldn't be a surprise if she ended up being expelled from the team.

After a brief moment of consideration, Arche finally opened her mouth.

"...Since my family considers it a huge disgrace, I never told this to anyone, but... the Blood Emperor revoked my family's nobility status."

The Blood Emperor—Jircniv Rune Farlord el Nix. Renowned for staining his hands with blood.

Due to certain events that took place, the previous Emperor was forced to retire. Soon afterwards, what used to be one of the Five Great Families of the Empire, the family of the Blood Emperor's mother, was accused of assassinating the Emperor and eradicated. Things turned sour after that, where the brothers of the Blood Emperor died one after another. During that time, it was as if the winds that blew within the city carried death itself, and near the end, even his mother got caught in it and perished.

Of course, there was opposition during this period. However, this opposition was meaningless to the Blood Emperor, who already controlled the Empire’s knights during his time as the crown prince. Using overwhelming military force, every aristocrat that was capable of opposing him was cut down like wheat before the scythe. The only ones who remained were those who pledged their allegiance to the Emperor from the bottom of their hearts, and thus it ended with the

complete centralisation of power in him.

However, the Blood Emperor didn't just stop there. Many leftover aristocrats soon had their nobility revoked due to incompetence. Instead, capable commoners were given the chance to rise in status.

All in all, there were two main points that surprised people the most. First was that the national power of the Empire did not drop a single bit during the mass removal of aristocrats. Second was that the Emperor who had achieved all of this was only a boy one or two years past the age of ten.

It wasn't rare to see families that lost their nobility status. However—

"—Even now my parents still live the same lifestyle as before. Of course we can't afford the cost. That's why my parents ended up borrowing money from shady places."

Hearing this, the three of them glanced around at each other.

Although the three of them hid it well, feelings of anxiousness, irritation, unpleasantness and anger passed between them.

"—I have confidence in my magic abilities. I wish to join." These words had been said by a slender child holding a staff taller than herself.

The image of a small child with an expressionless face, who was holding her staff with both hands while standing before them, suddenly came back into the minds of Hekkeran and the others. Later, the image of their stunned faces after they saw the display of Arche's strength in magic came into view in their heads, resounding with nostalgia.

In the two years that went by, after experiencing numerous adventures and having survived adventures where even one wrong move would result in death, the money that they had gained was quite a considerable amount. However, Arche's equipment had hardly changed since the beginning.

The reason for that was finally made known.

"Is that for real? Should I go and have a proper 'talk' with them?"

"I think it's about time for your parents to hear the voice of God. No, no, perhaps they should meet the fists of God before that."

"I don't think their ears haven't been pierced yet, maybe I should start making holes in them."

"—Please calm down. It's already gotten to this stage, what I want to say is, depending on the situation I plan on taking my sisters away from my parents."

"You have sisters?"

Seeing Arche nod her head, the three of them looked at each other once more. Although they didn't say it out loud, but deep down in their hearts they started to feel that it might be better to give up on this particular request.

It was true that workers had a higher income than adventurers. However, the amount of danger they faced was also much higher. Although they tried their best at making sure the work they took on was as safe as possible, the chances of encountering situations outside their calculations was still quite high.

A single slip might result in a tragedy for her sisters. However, it was pointless to keep thinking along these lines.

"Is that so? ...Then let's put this topic on hold for now. We will let you handle your current problem... Anyway, back to our main discussion topic, do we accept the offered commission or not?"

Having said this, Hekkeran cast a cold gaze at Arche.

"Arche, I don't want to make it sound bad but you don't get a say in this."

"—That’s fine. For someone who’s in need of money, I can understand that my vote would be compromised because of my debt issue."

That was what they meant by being blinded by greed.

"—Truthfully, I had thought that I might end up becoming removed from this team."

"What are you saying? After having a magic caster as skilled as you join our team, it would be a huge loss for us to simply let you go."

This statement wasn't meant to provide any comfort. It was the truth.

Arche's innate talent. A pair of eyes blessed with miracles, had helped out Hekkeran's team multiple times in the past.

If a name had to be given to Arche's innate talent, the 'All-Seeing Eyes' would probably be the most suitable words to describe it.

Arcane magic casters were constantly surrounded by an invisible aura which wrapped around their body. However, Arche's innate talent allowed her to see it directly. Not only that, she was even able to see which tiers of magic the opponent was capable of using.

The advantage of being able to gauge the power level of opponents went without saying.

There was only one other person that Hekkeran knew of within the Empire that also possessed this ability. And that person was the Empire's highest ranked magic caster—Fluder Paradyne.

Although their eyes were the only things they had in common, it showed how gifted Arche was, since she was comparable to Fluder.

"To think that the Magic Academy would let such a talented child go."

"Exactly. To be capable of using the same tier of magic as me at such

a young age is simply unbelievable. Perhaps it's possible for Arche to reach the 6th tier in the future."

"—I think that would be quite difficult to achieve. However, I would be happy if the possibility exists."

Just as the previously broken atmosphere was about to recover, Hekkeran clapped his hands. Everyone's attention once more focused on the topic at hand.

"Now now, about the current request, do we accept or not?—Roberdyck."

"I have no objections."

"Imina?"

"Why not go with it? This is the type of work I've always wanted to do."

The work given to workers usually wasn't trivial stuff. Only a few days ago, they were still on the Kattse Plains exterminating undead. Work like that was quite different compared to what was offered now.

"In that case—"

"—If it's for my sake, please don't. Even if we refuse the offer this time I still have other ways."

The three of them glanced at each other, and a smile then appeared on Imina's face.

"No way. If you think about it, the request this time isn't the typical shady work. The reward is also really generous. Right, Rob?"

"That's how it is. It isn't for your sake at all. There's probably lots of undiscovered items within the ruins. Isn't it so, Hekkeran?"

"There you have it, Arche. Though it's regrettable that we can't make it known that we're the first explorers of the ruins."

"—My deepest gratitude."

Seeing Arche lowering her head, the three of them looked at each other and smiled.

"Well then, Arche and I will go and convert the plate into cash. The two of you go and prepare the necessary items for this adventure."

The items necessary for an adventure could include things like rope or oil, as well as certain magic items. For someone with a meticulous personality like Roberdyck, and Imina possessing the skills of a thief, this sort of work was perfect for them. On the other hand, one could say that Hekkeran was simply unsuited for tasks like his.

"Alright everyone, let's begin! ...Arche."

Turning towards Arche who was tilting her head with a baffled description, Hekkeran finally said out loud what he wanted to say before.

"The income from this commission isn't enough to cover your debt."

"—No problem. This much should be enough to extend the deadline by some time."

"You can borrow the rest from us."

"That's right. You can always pay us back later using the income earned from future jobs."

Of course it wouldn't be given for free since 'Foresight' members are all equal.

"—Hold on to it for now. I've already returned most of what my irresponsible parents borrowed. But give me some time to consider

things through."

"That's fine. Take your time."

The four of them looked at each other one last time before heading off to complete what they were tasked to do.

Part 3

In a certain high-class residential district within the Empire's capital, that occupied a vast area of land. Since long ago, rows of luxurious mansions have been built on this land, erected in the style of the past. Walking by these mansions would bring out a feeling of historical nostalgia. One could certainly guess that the type of residents that live here were most likely aristocrats.

The mansions of aristocrats were a sign of their status. One could see it as a waste of money, but if not extravagantly decorated, they would likely become subjects of ridicule.

Furniture, jewelry, clothing, mansion, courtyard—all of these things needed to be maintained in order for one to have status amongst the upper class of society. For aristocrats, who were continuously establishing connections and cliques, it was necessary to display their wealth. Living in a plain mansion was enough reason to be ridiculed and looked down upon. Because of this, aristocrats that were interested in politics and power had to constantly decorate their bodies and holdings. Realistically speaking, this was similar to the display of strength between military forces. It was a privilege reserved for the powerful.

These were the things one would see when looking around.

Even within the capital this area was one of the most well-regulated districts, where everything was nice and quiet. However, if you observed carefully, the quietness could be a bit unnerving. This was

due to the lack of human presence.

In truth, the majority of these mansions were unoccupied and empty. Due to the events set in motion by the Blood Emperor, the majority of their owners ended up being unable to sustain the expenditures of living in this district.

Among these empty mansions, there were still a few that were being used. Unlike before, the gardening was kept very rough and there were no longer servants waiting outside.

It was in one of those mansions that Arche's family lived. She was welcomed home by her parents, who bore the proper appearance of typical nobles with the rightful bearings and fancy clothes.

"Ooh, welcome home Arche."

"Welcome back."

Before properly replying, Arche turned to look at a delicately crafted piece of glasswork which had been carefully carved into the shape of a cup. It radiated an air of great expense.

Arche's face twitched due to having never seen it before.

"—This is?"

"Oh, this is Artist Jan's—"

"—I'm not asking that kind of question. This is something we didn't have before, why do we have it now?"

"That's because it was purchased just this morning."

That was her father’s casual reply, using the same tone as if he was saying something like ‘Good morning’. Hearing this, Arche's body started shaking.

"—How much?"

"Hmm... I think it only cost around 15 gold coins. Cheap, isn't it?"

Arche drooped her shoulders in despair. She had originally planned on using the deposit from

her current job to pay off a part of the debt, and now she found that it had risen even more.

"—Why did you buy it?"

"As aristocrats, if we can't even purchase things like this, we'll become the laughingstock of everyone."

Hearing the prideful laugh coming from her father, anger started to shine through Arche's eyes.

"—We're no longer aristocrats."

Arche's father's expression hardened at the sound of those words and his face turned completely red.

"That's wrong!"

Arche's father forcefully slammed his hand against the table. Due to the sturdiness of the table, the glasswork was not affected by the blow. Although Arche wouldn't have minded if it broke, her father probably wouldn't have felt any regret. It only costed fifteen gold coins, that’s what her father would think.

"As long as that piece of shit upstart dies, our family can instantly gain back its status! Members of our family have been nobles of the Empire for over a hundred years. It is absolutely unforgivable to end our line. This is an investment for our revival! Also, this display of power is to show that fool that we haven't given up!"

How foolish.

That was Arche's opinion of her father, who was currently out of breath due to his anger. The "fool" probably referred to the Blood Emperor. For someone like him, Arche's family wasn't even worth consideration. If they really planned on regaining their nobility, this definitely wasn't the method to use.

Being trapped in their own small world, they wouldn't be able to see what was happening outside.

Arche helplessly shook her head.

"The two of you stop fighting."

Seeing her laid-back mother, Arche decided to call it quits with her father.

Shortly afterwards, her mother stood up and passed a small vial to Arche.

"Arche. This is perfume, bought just for you."

"—How much?"

"Three gold coins."

"Is that so... thank you."

While calculating in her heart the eighteen gold coins that got wasted, Arche said her thanks to her mother. After accepting the tiny vial that contained a very small quantity of perfume, she placed it into her bag.

It was hard for Arche to look at her mother with such a cold gaze. At least perfumes and makeup had more practical uses than glasswork.

Properly dressing oneself up and attending high-class parties were a means for nobles to mingle together and make connections. If one considered marriage, pregnancy and childbirth to be a woman's

happiness, then it was important for daughters of nobility to decorate themselves, at least from a noble's point of view.

However, even if that was the case, in their current situation, Arche's simply couldn’t afford to be this wasteful. Also, three gold coins were enough to feed a normal family for a whole month.

"—I've said this countless times already, keep spending to a minimum. Only buy what you really need."

"Exactly, that's what I said! This was necessary!"

Feeling tired of arguing, Arche simply stared at the flushed face of her father. Having to continuously remind them of such simple things was becoming too much for her. She could only blame herself for all of this. If she had used force to resolve these things in the beginning, it wouldn't have ended up this way. Also, she wouldn't have brought trouble to 'Foresight'.

"—I'm no longer going to send money home. I will take my sisters with me and live elsewhere."

Hearing the quiet words spoken by Arche, her father started to heat up once more. What unnerved her father the most was probably the loss of her income, Arche thought indifferently.

“Just who do you think it was that raised you from birth to now?”

"—I've already repaid my obligations."

Arche forcefully ended the conversation. The amount of income she had earned so far, while not ridiculously high, was still quite a considerable sum. That money had been earned during the adventures she took with her comrades, and should have been used to strengthen herself just like the rest of her teammates had done.

Seeing how she never updated her equipment, what would her comrades think?

Not having strong equipment would mean she was the weakest member of the team.

However, the members of 'Foresight' never said a thing to her about it. Arche had been spoiled too much by this already.

Arche stared intensely. Having received the full burst of Arche's gaze, her father caved in and looked away. For someone who had gone through life and death situations, there was no reason for Arche to lose to a bumbling aristocrat of a father.

Arche glanced once more at her speechless father and left the room.

Walking out of the room, Arche sighed in relief.

"Ojou-sama."

"—What's wrong, James?"

James had been the butler to Arche's family for a long time now. A tense expression was visible on his wrinkled face. That face had been seen very often since her family’s fall from grace.

"Although I don't wish to say such things to ojou-sama but..."

Arche raised her hand and interrupted the speech. After considering that it wasn't a butler's right to say certain things, James distanced himself away.

Arche took out a small bag and opened it. Various different lights sparkled from within. The majority of the lights were silver, followed by bronze. The least amount were gold.

"—This much should be enough right?"

Having been handed the bag, James looked inside and finally relaxed his face.

"Salary, as well as the interest for the merchants... I think I should be able to solve the rest. Ojou-sama."

"—That's good."

Arche finally managed to relax. Although it was the bare minimum amount, it was just enough to scrape by.

"—You weren't able to stop father from buying it?"

"It couldn't be helped. The seller came with nobles acquainted with us. Although I did remind the old master multiple times..."

"—I see."

The two of them sighed.

"—Just a small question. How much do I need to prepare in order to clear everything away?"

James widened his eyes, and then returned a sad smile. Perhaps the reason why there wasn't any movements in his eye was because he had already seen it coming.

"Certainly. Once I finish calculating it, I will bring it in."

"—I'll be relying on you then."

At that moment, the sound of running was be heard within the corridor. Even without looking up, Arche knew who it was.

Softening her face, Arche turned around just in time to see a shadow running towards her and leaping at her without slowing down.

The figure that had leapt into Arche's embrace had a height of less than one meter. Her age was around five years old, with eyes similar to Arche's. While hugging Arche, this girl raised her face and displayed an expression of dissatisfaction with her pink cheeks

bulging.

"Way too hard."

This wasn't directed at Arche's flat chest.

Arch was wearing clothes made for adventuring. The area around the chest and abdomen had been reinforced with hard leather to improve its defensive properties. Running into it would definitely feel like running into a hard surface.

"—Are you okay?"

She touched the girl's cheek while stroking her head.

"Mm, I'm fine. Onee-sama."

Seeing the happy face made by her sister, Arche started to smile.

"...I shall leave the two of you be, then" Arche expressed her thanks towards the butler that did not wish to disturb the two of them, and then turned around to once more stroke her sister's head.

"Ulei... when in the hall..."

Arche suddenly stopped speaking halfway. She was about to say that it was inelegant for daughters of nobility to run inside the house, but after having told her father that they were no longer nobles, scoldings like these were no longer needed.

During this period, Arche's hand did not stop once, though the girl whose hair had already become a complete mess did not mind at all and continue to laugh.

Arche looked around her surroundings, and confirmed that one other person wasn't here.

"Where's Kuude?"

"Inside her room!"

"Is that so... there are a few things that I wish to speak with the two of you, let's go together."

"Mm."

Protecting the cheerful smiles of her sisters was Arche's responsibility. Holding Ulei's hand, a warm feeling quickly grew inside Arche. Ulei's small hands were something that even Arche's hands could fully cover.

"Onee-sama's hand is really hard."

Arche looked at her other hand. Due to injuries received from numerous adventures, these hardened hands could no longer be called hands befitting an ojou-sama from a noble family. However, she had no regrets. These hands were proof that she was living her life together with friends—her comrades in 'Foresight'.

"But I still really like it!"

With her hand tightly grasped by her both of her sister's, Arche smiled and said;

"—Thanks."

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As usual, the North Market of the Empire's Capital was full of energy. However, the number of customers that frequented the North Market was a lot less when compared to the central market, due to the specialisation of the sold products. As such, it wasn't difficult to navigate through the less crowded streets.

Seeing the usual atmosphere surrounding the market, Hekkeran and Roberdyck relaxed their shoulders and started browsing.

The reason why they were able to relax their guards was because they were at the northern market—it was probably one of the safest districts within the capital.

"Well then, Hekkeran. What do we need to buy?"

"First would be healing items. We'll need to stock up on those ‘Wands of Cure light wounds’. Depending on the situation, we might also need some ‘Wands of Cure moderate wounds’... Don't select any that have a low number of uses. From what I've heard, our target location is a tomb, we might need to use them on the undead. After that, we need to stock up on items that counter undead creatures, poisons and diseases. We also need to have counter-measures against negative energy and undead without physical form... Items that have unlimited usage are too expensive, so it might be better to also stock up on scrolls inscribed with magic as well."

Wands were a type of item that could hold multiple charges of a single spell. The user could keep casting the spell until the number of charges were used up. As such, when compared to scrolls that could only be used once, wands were much more valuable for certain applications, such as healing.

"Is that so? I had thought that we were here to buy gifts, and you wanted my advice."

"Gifts?"

"... Don't worry about it, Hekkeran. Let's start searching for what we need."

"...Oh, okay."

The stores within the northern market were all open-air markets, neatly arranged and filled with items for people passing by to see.

The items on display were typically placed on single sheets. One sheet per item. However, the majority of the items on sale at each store were only medium-quality goods. New or unknown items were rare sights here.

The majority of the vendors here seemed to be capable of handling themselves well. They either possessed powerful looking weapons or were dressed like magic casters. Compared to typical merchants, these looked like seasoned warriors.

At first glance these vendors looked out of place, but they really were the owners of their respective stores, even if it was only for the current day. During other times, they would usually be working as adventurers or workers. In other words, the actual profession of the vendors were similar to that of Hekkeran's and Roberdyck's.

They usually sold equipment or items they no longer needed, or whatever they found during their adventures. When compared to selling to merchants who specialized in magic items or to the Magician Association, finding their own customers could eliminate having to pay processing fees and thus lower the price of their items. The amount saved from this was larger than the fees one had to pay to set up their own store.

Due to this reason, adventurers and workers like Hekkeran frequented the northern markets first in order to look for bargains. Some even came everyday if they had the time.

And lastly, this was the main reason why the crime rate in the north market was low. Who would be crazy enough to cause a ruckus in a district full of combat veterans?

After spending some time looking around, the faces on the two of them were neither gloomy nor glad.

"Found anything?"

"Nothing."

Since the merchandise on sale were mostly unwanted goods, it was hard for Hekkeran and others to find the items they needed. Although these items might be suitable for Adventurers or inexperienced workers that were lower ranked, for the two of them—even when taking their companions into consideration—there simply wasn't anything useful.

"How regrettable. As I thought, it would have been faster if we had gone to the usual place to buy them."

"I only came here hoping to find bargains. It can't be helped if we can't find anything. Well, this is only the first step for us to start saving."

"Savings huh... Hekkeran, what do you think we should do?"

"Having only said this much and you already caught on, are you a super high ranked magic caster or something? ... It's obviously about Arche."

"You already know about that."

"Well, from what's already been said I can sort of tell."

"Then you know what I wanted to say right?"

"...That this might be our last adventure, right?"

"Please don't say such phrases that might jinx us." Roberdyck laughed bitterly. "Although it looks to be that way. If Arche-san says she will take her sisters under her care, it looks like our adventures in the future won't be as easy anymore."

"Just as you said. Although one would still need to work, but it doesn't need to be only from adventuring."

"It'll be easy for her to find another job. She's a third tier magic caster after all. Family—although we don't know how many sisters she has,

she should be fine if she only needs to look after three or four people."

"Ah, I think so too. That's why she probably made this decision."

"And now the problem is at our end. In case our wizard Arche leaves the team, what shall we do about our next member?"

"If only a third tier magic caster would suddenly fall from the sky."

"Please try and separate your dreams from reality... If we were adventurers, then the Guild would help solving our problem... We'll need to rely on luck if we need to search for one ourselves."

The two of them looked at each other and sighed.

Losing a comrade. Being unable to keep up. Or being the only person in the team with powers that stand out. These were the typical reasons for an adventurer or worker to leave their team. These situations weren't uncommon. It was rare for a team to have kept the same members from the beginning to the end. In typical cases, a team would have had changed its members at least two to three times.

It was the same for Hekkeran, Roberdyck and Imina.

Although having said this, arcane magic casters were hard to find—especially those capable of using 3rd tier magic. For workers that were currently companionless, the quality of their character was an entirely separate issue that also needed to be addressed.

"How about training a 2nd tier magic caster?"

"Let's make that our last resort. I'd wish to avoid that if possible."

"It's also really troublesome when choosing new members. The majority of those who become workers tend to have messed up personalities. If we chose wrong, things could get very messy, such as accidentally picking up a battle maniac."

"...Thinking back on this, we've been quite lucky haven't we?"

"It's quite a rare case for the whole team to be composed of only those who desire money. Well, Arche's case is a bit different."

"Back when Arche-san first approached us, we were just thinking about how to fill in the vacancy for the last member."

Roberdyck stared at the distance reminiscing about the past. Hekkeran felt he was thinking the same thing.

"I can still remember what I was drinking at that time... The timing of Arche-san's arrival was so great that I started to think the formation of our team was brought on by God's will."

"Heh, that's amazing. I can only remember vaguely. What were you drinking?"

"Water."

"Isn't that the same as usual then? ... Looks like you really don't drink alcohol at all. Although it'll be annoying if you also start drinking like Imina."

"It can't be helped. I'm a non-drinker… Though I have to admit Imina-san's drinking habit really is a bit scary."

"Well, Rob, a single cup is enough to turn your face red, then blue and then finally white. I'm still wondering what would have happened at that time if we didn't use magic to remove the poison."

"Someone else would probably be standing here instead. It's not like people haven't died from alcohol poisoning before." Roberdyck shrugged as he said. "Getting back on topic, what do we do about Arche-san's situation? Are we going to end up disbanding?"

"... If we really can't find a replacement then that will have to happen. It's simply too dangerous for three people to go

adventuring... maybe we'll have to go back to being adventurers again?"

"I just can't go along with the regulations set by the Temples. If it has to be that way then I'd rather retire."

"Retire, huh... That's not a bad thought."

"I still have the savings we earned, I'll look for a job where I can help other people or protect the weak. It's also not bad to just be a farmer in some flourishing village while studying the teachings of God. What about you Hekkeran?"

"Hmm, just what should I do?"

Roberdyck's mouth twitched.

"...Is that something you can just decide on your own?"

It took some time for Hekkeran to fully process what Roberdyck had said. After finally comprehending, he raised his head.

"—Naa!"

"Kuku..." It was a wicked laugh, "you thought I hadn't noticed?"

"Aah. Aah. Aah! Aah! No, it wasn't something that I was trying to hide. You see, the timing... Is that what you were talking about? The gift."

"Who's giving it to who?"

"Hey, Rob! Look over there!"

In the direction that Hekkeran pointed, two people were currently viewing merchandise that was on display beneath a pretty pavilion.

One of them was a warrior clad in pure black armor, with a crimson

cape behind his back and carrying a gigantic sword.

"Such an abrupt change of topic... well, it doesn't matter. I'll just have to find out more later on. Hmm, such stunning equipment. If the wearer has matching skills, then he would be quite a remarkable warrior. Is it someone that we know, who managed to upgrade their equipment?"

"I'm not too sure, but at least I don't think they're from the capital. For example, see that woman hiding over there? I've never seen her face before."

"The angle from where I'm at is bad. How does she compare against Imina-san?"

"—Please don't ask me that. I can't possibly answer that! ... Honestly speaking, the woman over there is really pretty."

"Imina-san is quite a beauty too. For even her lover to be saying this... So that's how it is, these two are either travelers or travelling adventurers. Perhaps they've decided to relocate to the capital."

"However, they're looking at magic household items, isn't that rather weird?"

Underneath the pretty pavilion, rows of magic items were neatly arranged. However, unlike the magic items used by adventurers and workers, the ones on display were for everyday usage. Examples were containers that kept their inside temperature cold, basically acting like a refrigerator that prevents food from deteriorating. Or fan-like items, capable of blowing wind.

These types of magic items had largely been proposed by a minotaur hailed as "The Boastful Sage" two hundred years ago.

Even though he had proposed the creation of many items, he had been unable to explain why these items needed to be in this particular shape or how they worked, so in the end this warrior was unable to create them and ended up with such a title.

However, his skills as a warrior had been beyond first-class, and left behind the legend that one swing of his axe was capable of creating tornados and splitting the earth. He was also well known for raising the status of humans within the Great Minotaur Nation from a species that was treated as food to slaves used for labor.

It was quite a rare sight to see adventurers, who tended to live in inns, looking at magic household items that were thought up by this demi-human, and had no uses for adventuring.

"It's not that weird. The Empire's magical knowledge is quite advanced. It's also cheaper than in other countries. Maybe they're thinking that even after taking the return cost into account, it's cheaper to buy them there?"

"Ah, so that's why. I see. That's a way of thinking I didn't consider before."

"It's true that from our point of view their actions seems strange, but it's not so weird if you keep in mind that they're travellers."

"Ah, that's right. If I think of it this way then I definitely can understand."

The armor clad warrior was carefully inspecting the magic items. Opening them, then closing, picking them up, turning them around. To the point of making the merchant's head sweat.

"We should be just as serious as them when searching for magic items."

"Yeah."

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1. A Yoroidoshi (鎧通し) is a variant of the tanto and lit. an

“armor piercer”. See on Wikipedia

Chapter 2 - Butterfly Entangled in a Spider's Web

Part 1

Several worker teams had already gathered on the Earl's estate before dawn. The last team to arrive was Hekkeran's 'Foresight'. In total, eighteen people were present. The workers gathered for this job were considered to be among the cream of their profession in the capital.

The worker teams maintained a distance between each other as they sized each other up. When the four members of 'Foresight' finally arrived, they were welcomed by the collective stares of the other worker teams. This scene could almost be considered spectacular in its own way.

"Ah, somehow I feel like I've seen all these faces somewhere before. Such as Beetle-san over there, didn't I see him recently at Kattse Plains?"

"Eh? Did I not mention this in the hotel? Greenham's team also accepted this request… Did I really not say this? Somehow I feel like I've said this before… In any case, the worker teams that are gathered today all possess considerable fame within the capital! Let's have a round of applause for the deep pockets of the client."

"I think I'll pass on that. Anyways, the ones over there are the team leaders, right?"

In the area between the separated teams, three people had gathered in the center, exchanging information.

"Greenham should be over there, it seems. No doubt about it. Well then, time to go and greet them."

"…Tch! Urgh, that guy is also there? Ah, I see. Then, the elf girls over there are… Hmph, that guy is absolutely the worst. Die, you piece of shit."

Imina practically spat that last sentence out. Although she kept her voice down, it still worried Hekkeran and the others enough that they had to quickly check their surroundings to see if anyone else had noticed.

"Imina-san!"

"I know, I know, Rob. He's going to be a colleague for this job… However, I really don't want to see that guy's face."

"—I don't like it either."

"Well, if I had to pick between like and hate, I also dislike him. Even so, you still need to consider the situation."

Hekkeran, who broke into the conversation between Imina, who was showing a vexed face, and Roberdyck, helplessly shrugged.

"…Oi, oi, you still have to greet him afterwards, so don't think about unpleasant thoughts, or they'll show on your face, okay?"

"Do your best, leader."

Hekkeran frowned in response to Roberdyck's encouragement, as though saying "don't poke into other people's businesses", and then walked towards the group of three.

The first person that greeted Hekkeran was a worker who wore a

steel-blue suit of full plate armor. The design of the armor was oddly rounded, almost spherical. Due to the especially large pauldrons, the man wearing the armor appeared more like an upright beetle than a human.

However, after seeing that the helmet had a horn-like design which stuck out from the forehead, it became obvious that the armor was intended to look this way.

However, one thing that wasn't intentional was the length of the man's legs. They were very short. The sight of him wearing the armor was like a real rhinoceros beetle that had been forced to stand upright by children who were playing around. To put it in kinder terms, short legs like those of dwarves gave more stability. It was one of the traits which suited a warrior.

"Just as I had foreseen, thou also came, Hekkeran."

"Yo, Greenham. I thought the request wasn't too bad so we came."

Hekkeran raised his hand as a gesture at the remaining two leaders in a casual manner. The two of them responded back without any unpleasantness. Although Hekkeran was the youngest and least experienced of the four of them here, his skills as a worker were on the same level as them.

"About your side…" Hekkeran said, after glancing over to Greenham's team and quickly counting them. "There's five of you. What happened to the rest?"

"Resting, recovering from fatigue. Due to our previous work being of similar nature, some of our members had to stay behind to help with the transportation and repair of damaged goods."

This man, Greenham, was the leader of 'Heavy Masher', a worker team comprising of fourteen members.

Having more members definitely had its advantages, such as having more options available in choosing how to handle each request. In

particular, it provided the flexibility of being able to select the best suited members for each different request.

However, it was not without its disadvantages, such as receiving less income due to having to split the payment between more people, or running into more conflicts due to disagreements between members, which made it more difficult for them as a team to take fast action.

When taking into consideration the personalities of typical workers, it wouldn't be unusual at all for a team to just suddenly disband. Being able to maintain full control over such a large team of workers demonstrated just how strong Greenham's management and leadership skills were.

"Fuuhn, how tiring. How about supporting us so you can earn enough not to disappoint the comrades you left behind?"

"Thy suggestion is foolish. After we finish this job, bonuses will be given based on the leader's performance. As unfortunate as it is, the best performance will naturally belong to me."

"Oi oi, spare me already. It's fine to speak like you normally do."

Greenham simply grinned. Sensing that he had no intention of stopping, Hekkeran shrugged and turned towards the other man.

"I think it's the first time we've met face-to-face."

Hekkeran stretched his hand out, with a "pleased to meet you" intention. The other man grasped it and shook back. He had a very strong grip.

He moved his eyes and stared directly at Hekkeran.

"—'Foresight', I've heard a lot about you."

It was a voice that sounded as clear as a bell, which matched very well with his appearance.

"Likewise, 'Tenmu'."

The genius swordsman that was undefeated in the arena, there wasn't a single worker who wouldn't recognize who he was. This man's 'Tenmu', was in a sense a team composed purely of himself. Part of it was the reason why Imina made her previous unpleasant face.

"The sword genius who's said to be a match for the Kingdom's strongest, Gazef Stronoff. It's reassuring to have your squad with us."

"Thank you. However, I think it's about time for it to be said the other way around. That man should only be referred to as being able to match up to this Eruya Uzruth. "

"Oh. So good with words."

Eruya smiled faintly, fully displaying his arrogance. Seeing this smile, the unpleasant feelings concealed inside Hekkeran almost surfaced again.

"Well then, we'll be relying on you inside the ruins."

"Of course. Leave it to me. It'll be great if there are monsters that can put up a decent fight inside the ruins."

Eruya said as he tapped on the weapon hanging by his waist, producing a 'pon pon' sound.

"It's completely unknown what kind of monsters might exist inside. Perhaps we'll even run into dragons?"

"That would be quite scary. Monsters such as dragons would definitely put up a hell-of-a fight. However, victory would still be mine."

Putting up a 'is that so?' smile, Hekkeran was the last one to react due to forcefully having to suppress his other emotions.

Taking only the skills with a sword into account, there were rumors that Eruya could even win against orichalcum ranked adventurers. Considering this point, there was some basis behind his boasting. Having confidence was a good thing, since it was also important for workers to showcase their abilities and appeal to their clients.

However, there should be a limit to just how much one can boast.

The world's strongest race, Dragons.

Masters of the sky, capable of producing powerful breaths, with scales that were near impenetrable, and possessing a physical prowess that was superior by far. As they age, they even became able to use magic. Having a life span that humans simply couldn't compare with, the wisdoms that they accumulate would humble even sages.

They were the kind of existences often described in legends, whether as evil villains or as beings that aided the heroes. Just like in the tales of the Thirteen Heroes, the last opponent in their adventures was a dragon known as the 'Dragon God'. In many stories, dragons tended to be the final opponents of heroes.

Even though these existences were only used as an example during conversations, but to still be able to act this arrogantly was rather surprising. No matter how one interpreted it, Eruya's words seemed like a joke. However he could tell that Eruya was completely serious just from the looks in his eyes. Just how self-conceited could he be?

It was still uncertain what kind of monsters would be in the ruins. Eruya's sense of judgement would definitely be a hindrance to the overall operation of things.

It's probably best to stay away from him.

It would be convenient if he was to perish by himself, but it would still be troublesome if the overall formation became broken. A faint smile appeared on Hekkeran's face as he reached his conclusion, and adjusted his attitude towards Eruya, towards the direction of 'discard

after use’.

"Over there must be the members of 'Foresight'. Oya—"

The look of his eyes when he saw Imina was filled with prejudice and disdain.

There were rumors that Eruya hailed from Slane Theocracy, where humans were considered the most superior race. As an alleged citizen of the Theocracy, he had the tendency to treat those with mixed blood as lower-class humans.

For a man like that to see a half-elf such as Imina to be participating as an equal simply did not make him any happier.

It’s because of this that the rumors end up becoming so credible… However, people from the Theocracy should have a baptismal name, although there’s also been rumors that he’s forsaken it.

Hekkeran considered this deep in his heart, and said out loud just in case.

"…Oi, oi, don’t be so hostile to my comrade, okay?"

"Of course. We’ll be comrades for the same work this time. I’ll definitely be cooperative."

"I will take your word for it."

Perhaps the powerful wild child Eruya matured, but Hekkeran was still afraid that he would run amok. In short, he could feel the mental instability of Eruya. Hekkeran couldn’t relax even after giving the warning, that’s how unpleasant the atmosphere was.

"Ay, trust me. Anyway, returning to the previous topic, I don’t mind letting someone else take leadership during this trip. As long as there are no special cases, I’ll follow the orders given. If we encounter battle, I don’t mind taking the frontlines. I’ll let you guys witness my

blade skills."

"Yes yes, understood."

"…Well then, I'll be returning to my team then. If there are any problems just call me."

Eruya bowed, and walked off.

Hekkeran's face slightly twitched after seeing a number of women following Eruya. However, showing one's emotions here was simply unacceptable. It was not uncommon for situations to suddenly turn unfavorable after one's emotions were exposed. As the leader of a team, this kind of behavior would be unacceptable.

Hekkeran suppressed his emotions, and removed all facial expressions.

Looking away from what he considered as trash, he greeted the final person.

"Hello, elder. I see you're still healthy and well."

"Hoi, Hekkeran. You're also looking well."

The sounds produced from the words said were due to the loss of frontal teeth.

Parupatra 'Green Leaf' Ogrion.

Also known as the 'Origin', he wore armor that looked as if it were brimming with lights reflected from green leaves wet from the morning dew. The armor wasn't made from metal, but rather from the scales of a Green Dragon. Parupatra's team was able to successfully hunt a dragon. Of course, from the size of the scales one could tell that it wasn't that powerful. However, even then a dragon of that size was still an existence that posed a severe threat to adventurers and workers alike.

Furthermore, Parupatra was over eighty years old.

Typically, in this line of work, the majority of people would have retired by their early forties, sometimes even before forty. There were very few adventurers above the age of fifty. As harsh as it may seem, for a profession which is constantly surrounded by death, it's hard to ignore the decline in one's physical abilities.

In fact, even as a special case, when compared to his peak, the time when he was at Orichalcum rank, his skills had dropped considerably. Even so, Parupatra still hadn't left the front lines.

Many people within the industry respected Parupatra for continuing to adventure despite his advanced age.

"Fumuu. However, that guy seems a bit dangerous."

The wrinkled face of Parupatra became tense as he spoke in a hushed voice. Hekkeran also agreed.

"That's right. It doesn't matter if he ends up killing himself, but it'll be bad if we end up getting dragged down with him."

"Indeed, it's true that guy is really strong, but his overconfidence could endanger the rest of us. He's like a walking hazard."

Greenham also chipped in with a whispered "So troublesome to deal with". After seeing Eruya's attitude, almost none of the workers would think otherwise.

"Also, just how strong is that guy anyways? I haven't been to the arena recently."

"Does thee not know? I however, do—does elder also know?"

"I've only heard about it but never witnessed in person. I might be able to find out more if I ask my comrades. In the end, how do we define the threshold for strong? If we use Gazef Stronoff as the

reference point, from what this old man currently know of… for example, ah that's right… where would we place the Four Knights of the Empire?"

"The knights titled 'Heavy Explosion', 'Unmovable', 'Lightning', and 'Violent Wind' huh… That's quite difficult to judge. Although it's true that when compared against that man, the Kingdom's Warrior Captain, the Four Knights are slightly weaker. However, the time of Gazef Stronoff being the strongest is already over. The passage of time have finally triggered the arrival of stronger beings, signaling the birth of a new era."

"Are you talking about Uzruth? Is he really that strong? Besides, I've never witnessed the actual strength of the Empire's Four Knights in person… The strongest that I've seen so far would be the captain of the Mithril Imperial Guards under the direct command of the Emperor. He's also quite strong… maybe on the same level as the Four Knights?"

"From what this old man knows so far, the strongest amongst all would be the Dragon Lords from the Republic. Those aren't something that humans can go up against."

"I did hear that there were five or seven of them… Opps, let's first get back to putting a rough estimate on the strength of Uzruth. Let's limit it to just the swordsmen among humans for now."

"If we're doing it this way then we'll have to exclude the swordsmen from the Argrand Republic since they're mostly composed of demi-humans. It'll be the same for the Warrior King of the arena. What's left would be the Valkyrie Knight of the Holy Kingdom who wields the Sacred Blade, but that means we'll only be comparing sword skills in the end."

For workers, gathering information on those who were strong could be extremely important for the completion of requests. Because if they ever ended up as opponents that needed to be faced during a request, one could quickly decide how to proceed. Beyond this, it's also natural for those who live by their swords to collect this kind of

information.

That was what was happening right now. Originally, it was supposed to be a discussion on just how strong Uzruth really was, yet it was slowly turning into an information exchange of those who were strong. It was almost becoming like an argument between children where phrases like "that guy is so strong!" could be heard.

"While the overall skill level of those in the Slane Theocracy is quite high, I've yet to hear of any particularly prominent ones. Anyways, even if there are, we won't be including divine magic casters here right?"

"Doesn't the Kingdom also have a female warrior that is of the highest adventuring rank? How good is she?"

"Ah, that 'Boob-less Big Chest'. She's quite strong indeed. However, I heard that she lost to the Warrior Captain during the tournament."

"…I seem to recall that she had almost beaten an adventurer to death for calling her that. Hya, hya, hya... Such a scary woman!"

"At the pace we're going, it's getting more and more difficult to name more. Let's see, the one referred to as the Dark Knight of the City Alliance, Serabright the 'Flash' from the adamantite rank adventuring team 'Crystal Tear' and Optics the 'Crimson' from the worker team 'Great Blaze of the Crimson Lotus', both from the Draconic Kingdom. Also, hailing from the Kingdom… Brain Unglaus."

The conversation stopped for the first time.

"Brain Unglaus? Who the heck is that?"

Parupatra inconceivability asked Greenham in a surprised manner.

"Does elder not know? He's also a famous swordsman of the Kingdom… how about thee?"

Hekkeran shook his head. It was a name that he did not know.

"I see, thou knew it not…"

Unable to hide his disappointment, Greenham used an unreliable tone as he tried to recall what he knew.

"Although this was from before, back during the time when I entered the tournament held by the Kingdom, he was the opponent I faced during the quarter-finals. The me of that time couldn't even reach his ankles."

"Wasn't that the tournament where Gazef Stronoff also participated in?"

"That's right. The result was that Brain Unglaus lost to Gazef Stronoff. However, a match between the strong can truly be described as spectacular. It was almost like a perfect textbook play for swordsmen, how they deflected and parried each slash, how they decided the angle of one's swing based on the given situation at hand… et cetera. Those can only be described as eye openers truly showing you the depth of swordplay."

For a man like Greenham to be saying this, it definitely showed just how skilled that Brain Unglaus must have been in order to be able to fight evenly against the strongest warrior known in the Kingdom. His skills would definitely be first class.

Hekkeran sighed. It appeared that there were still plenty of strong guys out there that he didn't know of.

"Fumuu… Well then, between Unglaus and Uzruth, which one would be stronger? Tell us your thoughts."

"Uzruth." Greenham answered "If compared against the Unglaus of that time then the winner definitely would be that guy. It was only recently that I watched some of his battles in the arena, so I'm sure of it."

"So in other words, Uzruth would have been able to match evenly against the Kingdom's Warrior Captain of back then? Is he really that strong!? Otto!"

Due to over excitement, Hekkeran accidently raised his voice and had to suppress himself.

"I see. Unglaus huh. Looks like I was able to gain a bit more information about the Kingdom… Oh that's right, have you guys heard? Doesn't the Kingdom now have its third adamantite ranked adventurer team?"

"Of course, I've already heard, elder."

"Ah, sorry. I haven't heard."

"Hekkeran… Thou ignorance could bring much harm to thy team. "

"I already know that. However, it's really difficult to gather information on those of the same profession as us within the Kingdom. It's also a waste of money."

"Hya hya hya. So courageous. This old man does not dislike that!"

"Elder, I wish to hear thy opinion on this. I've heard lots of rumours about Momon from 'Darkness', but some of them are just ridiculously outrageous. For example, being able to successfully subjugate a Gigant Basilisk with only two members and without the support of any healers."

"Uwah, aren't those simply false rumors?"

Even for adamantite adventurers, to be able to defeat such a strong opponent like the Gigant Basilisk with only two people was simply near impossible.

"Does thou also agree, Hekkeran? The more information I gather, the more dubious the whole thing seems. Even regarding the information

on the event that happened within the Kingdom's capital, the rumors were that they defeated a demon with a difficulty rating of over 200 in just one hit. In my opinion, it seems more likely that the Kingdom's Adventurer Guild deliberately spread wrong rumors out of personal interests, just to gain additional adamantite ranked adventurers."

"That's possible. The appearance of new high ranking adventurers is definitely an amazing thing. However, would the Guild really do something like this? They're very strict on certain things, that's why they're called a guild."

"In that regard, it's a bit different in each city depending on the Guildmaster who's in charge. Back when this old man was still an adventurer, the Guildmaster that was in charge of my city was the absolute worst. I ended up punching him straight in the face. Hya hya hya! I've been a worker ever since that incident."

Parupatra laughed happily.

The story behind why Parupatra became a worker was extremely well known. It might be reasonable to say that there shouldn't be any workers within the Empire's capital that didn't knew it. This was something that was often brought up by Parupatra after he gets drunk.

"Having said this much, I don't think it's likely that the Guild would do this kind of stuff."

"In that case, you think it's true then?"

"It's hard to believe. Even when I try to think about it rationally, a difficulty rating of 200— it's already hard enough to imagine just how terrifyingly strong that would be, to be able to defeat that kind of opponent in just one hit is simply impossible. Even if that was possible the probability would have to be extremely low. Could it be that the event happened more like this, a super high difficulty rating demon appeared and countless teams tried to subjugate it, and the final blow was delivered by the 'Darkness'?"

"If you say it like that, then it sounds a lot more believable."

"I think it's possible. It wouldn't be that strange for someone within the adamantite rank to be that strong. The skill range between adamantite rank adventurers can be extremely big."

"So Hekkeran and I are of the same opinion, but elder thinks it really happened as told, is that right?"

"Hya hya hya. I do think of it that way."

"Seeing in person beats hearing a hundred tales. Now I want to meet him at least once… yet at the same time I don't."

Just as the two of them were about to agree to what Hekkeran had said, the sound of someone getting hit, followed by the cries of a woman, interrupted their conversation.

The workers that were present quickly focused their attention on the source of the disturbance. Some had already drawn their weapons and entered their battle state.

The source of the scream, which came from Eruya's direction, was one of Eruya's female companions, who was laying on the ground. Considering the situation, it seemed that Eruya was the one who had sent her flying. His face was distorted with rage, while a fearful expression could be seen on the woman as she begged for his forgiveness.

While desperately trying to suppress the feelings that fluctuated within his chest, the first thought that flashed in Hekkeran's mind was his comrade—he hurriedly cast a glance at Imina.

Having made up his mind, Hekkeran eliminated the expressions on his face and remained where he was. However, the pressure that was emitted from Hekkeran suggested that if anything further happens, he would definitely be the first to strike out.

Hurriedly, Hekkeran signaled to Roberdyck and Arche, instructing

them to stop Imina from taking any independent actions.

Personally, Hekkeran felt the same way as Imina. However, right now he didn't have the right to meddle in other team's affairs. Of course, if he really wanted to, there was nothing stopping him from taking action. It was just that he would then be required to take responsibility. Because of reasons like this, the other teams also didn't show any signs of wanting to be involved and simply expressed their disgust.

In the end, Imina was finally able to come to her senses, and suppressed her emotions. She made a rude gesture towards Eruya's back and spat on the ground.

"…It seems he can only match his swords skills with the Kingdom's Warrior Captain. It would be great if he could also match his personality, but that's just asking for too much. Well then, let's just end the useless chattering here."

"…I agree. Since Hekkeran has already arrived, it's time to decide on the most important thing."

"Since that guy has already backed out from this it's just between the three of us, but who will take the overall command of this operation?"

Suddenly everything became quiet.

There were four worker teams here. The amount of combat potential from the combined four teams could already be considered as something remarkable, however if not properly commanded, much of it would be wasted. No matter how many arms one might possess, if one was unable to make use of them in harmony, it's no better off than having just a single arm.

Managing multiple teams with a diverse range of personalities was already a difficult enough task to accomplish, to do so without receiving any complaints was even harder. Mistakes that occurred when giving commands could directly result in failure. And if the

leader prioritized his own team first, then he could even end up being the target of everyone’s resentment.

To make it clearer, it’s a responsibility that requires ability, yet comes with more demerits than merits.

Knowing this, the leaders quietly waited while studying each other’s expressions. After nearly one minute of silence, the tired Hekkeran made a suggestion.

"Honestly, I think it’s better not to do it this way."

"This will only delay the problem. What if it gets messy once the battle starts?"

"…I propose we dost take turns. This way dissatisfaction can be kept to a minimum. We can also discuss this further after we arrive at the ruins."

"Ah—"

"That’s right."

Thus Greenham’s proposal was accepted by both Hekkeran and Parupatra.

"In that case, let’s use the arrival order to determine the turns."

"What do we do with Uzruth’s 'Tenmu'?"

"It doesn’t matter even if we skip that guy’s turn. After all, he isn’t capable of leading in the first place."

"I can only agree, elder. In that case, the first one to take leadership will be me, 'Heavy Masher', the one who proposed this system."

"We’ll be in your care then, Greenham."

"I'll be relying on you, young one."

"Understood. However, the likelihood of us encountering dangerous monsters inside the Empire's territory is almost zero. It's only when we are in the Kingdom, near the Great Forest, that problems may occur."

"Ah, we should have reversed the order."

The two of them quietly laughed as Hekkeran face palmed himself when he stated that. However, they laughter quickly stopped when they noticed a man was walking towards them.

Light finally started to shine within the Earl's courtyard when his butler made his appearance. Walking with his back straight and tightened, the butler walked in a manner which reflected the standing of those who served the Earl.

Arriving in front of the workers, the butler stopped and bowed. Although no-one returned his bow, the butler didn't seem to mind and started speaking.

"Time is up. On behalf of the earl, I would like to express his gratitude to everyone here who accepted our House's request. There will be two representatives from our House who will be coming along for this trip. Including the adventurers hired for the security of the carriages and a few other things, all together there will be six additional people. The destination is the unexplored ruins located near the border of the Kingdom—from the structure it appears to be a tomb. The designated period for investigation is three days. Additional bonuses will be given out after the Master has confirmed the received goods discovered from the ruin. Are there any questions?"

The details that were given by the butler were almost the same as the initial request. The only new information was that adventurers would be guarding the carriages.

Many were interested in the details about the chosen travel route, but

as workers, one quickly learned to differentiate between which questions were allowed to be asked and which weren't. It was clear that this was something the Earl did not plan to reveal, otherwise it would have already been made public.

If it was a clean request, they would have hired adventurers instead. Since it was dirty work, the requestor obviously wouldn't reveal everything. Some things were simply safer not to know.

"…Well then, I will be leading everyone to the carriages we have prepared."

Without saying any words, the entire group followed the butler.

Hekkeran's 'Foresight' was at the very back of the group.

"That eru-shit, he's much better off dead. How about it? Should we do it?"

Unable to tolerate Eruya any further, Imina whispered this to Hekkeran.

"Although I've heard plenty of rumors before, but seeing it really shows just how despicable that man is."

"—Absolutely the worst."

The remaining two members also couldn't hide their disdain.

To 'Foresight', this type of opinion came naturally. Since they've already made the woman Imina into their comrade, the things that Eruya did were unforgivable.

In Eruya's team, except for himself, every other member was female. They were also elves.

If it was just that, then Imina and the others wouldn't be expressing as much contempt. However, they did have their reasons as to why

they considered Eruya as the lowest of the lowest lowlife.

The female elf members only possessed the bare minimum of equipment, their clothes were made from the plainest fabrics available, without any defensive capabilities. Furthermore, their short-cut hair revealed the stumps which showed the remains of what had been the distinctive long ears that elves normally possessed.

The reason why they, Eruya's team members, were in this state, was because they were slaves bought from the Slane Theocracy.

Slavery also once existed within the Empire, but during the previous Emperor's rule, many things were changed. Although they were still referred to as slaves, the meaning became completely different. However, nothing had changed for the demi-human slaves such as the ones fighting inside the arena.

The elf slaves that belonged to Eruya also fell under this category.

The Baharuth Empire, Re-Estize Kingdom, and Slane Theocracy, the percentage of human citizens living in these three countries could almost be calculated as 100%. Compared to other countries, these three clearly displayed more disdain towards non-human races. Because of this, even those who were half human—like Imina—had experienced difficulties.

The only exception were the dwarves. The Azellerisia mountains spanned the border between the Baharuth Empire and the Kingdom of Re-Estize, and inside these mountains existed the Dwarven Kingdom. As long as the Empire still maintained trade relations with the Dwarven Kingdom, the rights of Dwarves were protected.

"I do feel sorry for these elves, but right now isn't the time to save them."

Imina sighed deeply, deep inside she was aware of that, but her feelings simply couldn't be let go so easily.

"Let's go."

As Imina began to walk ahead, Hekkeran and others hastened their pace to catch up. What they saw once they caught up to the main group made their eyes widen in surprise.

Two carriages had been prepared for the journey to the ruins. There was also a group of people surrounding the carriages. They must be the adventurers that had been mentioned before. The plates hanging from their necks were all brimming with a golden radiance.

However, what had surprised them wasn't the carriages nor the adventurers, but rather the horses.

"—Sleipnirs."

The sound of surprise could also be heard from amongst the other workers.

With four pairs of legs, Sleipnirs were much larger in size compared to normal horses. Due to their superior muscle strength, endurance and mobility, Sleipnirs were regarded as the most versatile type of magical beast for travelling across lands.

Of course, the cost for one was also astronomical, enough to match the price for five or more battle horses. Even for aristocrats, it was uncommon for one to possess them.

Each carriage was pulled by two Sleipnirs. When taking into account the possibility of losing these horses during the adventure, the people that were aware of their worth couldn't help but appreciate the generosity of the Earl. Or maybe he simply feared that normal horses wouldn't have enough strength to pull all the treasures that would be found sleeping inside the ruins.

The others must have thought of this as well. The sound of people swallowing their saliva could be heard.

"Please make use of the carriages provided. Provisions have already been placed inside. For the safety of the carriages, as well as the security of the camp sites, we especially hired adventurers. Also,

please be aware that they've signed an agreement stating that they will not enter the ruins."

Suddenly thinking ahead, Hekkeran left his comrades and headed towards Greenham.

"My bad, Greenham. There's something that I wish to discuss."

"What's wrong? What do you wish to talk about?"

"It's about the pairing for the carriages, can you help me not being in the same carriage as 'Tenmu'?"

"En? Ah, I see. Thou unease is understood. It's reasons to do with your companion right? In that case our team will pair with 'Tenmu' instead."

"Sorry about this, you've helped me a lot."

"Don't worry about it, we're all in it together as companions during this job. It would be bad if something happens before we even start the investigation. If—"

"—Is it really okay for us to be relying on these gold ranked adventurers? What do we do if the campsite was overrun before we come back? Or if monsters manage to break through the security perimeter of the campsite?!"

Suddenly, a voice as loud and clear as a burning fireball could be heard by everyone, causing Hekkeran and Greenham to turn their focus elsewhere.

Eruya's words were directed towards the butler. However, he didn't bother concealing his voice. It was as if time suddenly froze, the movements of the adventurers who were moving the luggage stopped on cue.

Naturally, for those who are aiming towards the top, it was obvious

that the path became longer and steeper the further one travelled along it. Although it didn't matter how far one could reach at the end, the effort required to get to where they were now wasn't something that could be achieved easily. Their feelings after hearing what Eruya had said could only be described as unpleasant.

The profession of an adventurer was a highly competitive one, to have one's ability doubted—especially by the commissioner—could heavily impact their future career. It would then be necessary to display their strength.

Regardless of whether they were an adventurer or a worker, to be able to fearlessly dish out these words, the speaker must at least be at a powerful enough position which allows them to get away with it. As such, Eruya did not seem to mind the current atmosphere at all, and continued on.

"Well, I have to admit they're at least good enough to qualify as luggage lackeys, but when it comes to keeping everything safe, I'm not so sure."

Give me a break, please. It wouldn't be good at all if things turn ugly. Those guys are also restraining themselves due to already being hired…

The workers currently present were all as strong as mithril ranked adventurers. In other words, stronger than those adventurers. However, there were still certain things that one should definitely not say, based on the given circumstances.

Can someone give him a beating so he can shut up?

The atmosphere amongst the workers also started to tense up as the majority of them began to glare at Eruya in disapproval. Looking around, Hekkeran hurriedly rushed to the side of Imina. It wouldn't be good if blood started spewing.

However, the person that made the next move wasn't a worker.

"You must be Uzruth-sama. I do not believe there will be any

problems."

"…Is that under the assumption that we will also help in securing the campsite?? If it's like that then I can still accept your reply."

"That's not it. It's just that we requested the aid of someone stronger than those of you present—Momon-san."

As if responding towards the words spoken moments ago, a warrior clad in full plate mail stepped out from one of the carriages. Due to the helmet he was wearing, his face could not be seen.

"Please allow me to introduce everyone. Reaching the rank of adamantite with the power of only two people, the adventurer Momon-san from the 'Darkness'. His teammate Nabe is also present. With these two to protect the campsite, this arrangement… I hope everyone is satisfied?"

The atmosphere suddenly became completely different. To adventurers and workers, the one standing in front of them was one who had reached the peak of their profession. Under the presence of the strongest, every worker, regardless of who it was, kept quiet.

Seeing how the workers reacted to the appearance of an adventurer of the highest rank, the mood of the other adventurers improved. An affectionate smile emerged on the face of the leader of the adventurer team as he conversed with the warrior in black.

"Please let us handle the rest. In the meanwhile, could Momon-san continue the exchanges with the workers? Also, please take over the role of leadership and advise us on the security plans for the rest of the trip."

"Understood. Although I am still lacking, if your team have no problems with it, I will accept. However, I will still be relying on you guys as the main security force. Your team contains more people. It will be more convenient for us to assist instead."

"No! What are you talking about!? You're not lacking at all! Doing it

that way will drag Momon-san—"

"No, your team will still be tasked with the main security. Do make use of us. Now then, Nabe."

Having ended the conversation there with a voice which carried the hint of a faint smile, Momon walked down the stairs from the carriage. The person following behind Momon was a woman of astonishing beauty.

Usually, when a beautiful woman appears, there would always be some kind of commotion. However, things became very different if the level of beauty was overwhelming. In the presence of a truly beautiful woman, the only thing one could do was have their eyes stolen.

"Hekkeran. That person…"

"Aye, Rob. I was thinking the same thing. We saw her at the North Market. Over there… Momon of the 'Darkness'. Having only one companion. If it's like that, it seems like the rumor of defeating a Gigant Basilisk wasn't as big of an exaggeration as I had initially thought."

"Giga—! About that, is that true?"

"Seems like it. There's also a rumor that they defeated a demon with a difficulty rating of over 200 using a single attack. I heard this from Greenham."

"—That can't be real right? A difficulty of over 200 is beyond the limit of human capabilities. That isn't a territory humans could ever reach… Could it be that you misheard 100 as 200?"

"Even if it's like that, it would still be amazing. Yet somehow I get the feeling that it really did happen like it was said in the rumors. At least, that's how I feel."

Even though it was only a brief moment of conversation with the

gold ranked adventurer, the personality of Momon seemed to have been made clear. It was consistent with what the people expected of adamantite ranked adventurers. The impression given off by Momon was that of a likeable man.

"Before we begin the exchange… there's something I wish to hear from you guys."

Momon's voice wasn't particularly loud. However, the impression that one received when hearing the sound of his voice was that of majestic grandeur.

"Why have you decided to go to the ruins? Because you've accepted the request? However, different to how the Guild can sometimes force adventurers to take a request, there's nothing preventing you from rejecting this request. What is your reason for deciding to go?"

The workers exchanged glances at each other, hesitating on who should respond. In the end, the first to speak up was someone from Parupatra's Team.

"That's obviously because of money."

The perfect answer to the question. There was no other reason. The reason why the workers hesitated to answer wasn't because the question was hard, but rather, they were trying to determine Momon's true purpose of asking such an obvious question.

After confirming that every worker agreed with the given answer, Momon continued to ask.

"In other words, the reward offered from this request is enough for you guys to risk your life for?"

"That's right. The amount offered was enough to entice all of us. Also, bonuses will also be given if we discover additional treasures from the ruins. Isn't that enough for us to bet our lives on?"

The one who responded was Greenham.

"…I see. So this was the final decision you guys made. Understood. Looks like I've asked a pointless question. Please forgive me."

"What you asked wasn't particularly offensive… Please don't mind."

"Hya hya hya. Looks like you are done with the questions. In that case, could this old man also ask something?"

"Please go ahead, senior."

"I've heard many rumors about you. Whether they're true or not, this old man wishes to find out for himself."

"I see. Seeing something in person beats hearing a hundred tales huh? Alright. I'm fine with it. Then allow me to, no, allow us as the security guards to demonstrate our worth. In what manner would you wish to do this?"

"About that, obviously it's to have you face off against an opponent right?"

Everyone present suddenly focused their attention towards—

"—Of course, it'll have to be the one who proposed it. This old man himself."

"What? So senior wishes to choose himself? …I will apologize first then, but I'm not a man who is used to holding back when fighting. Although I may not have the intentions of wanting to cause injuries, I do not have enough confidence that I can control my strength properly—are you still fine with this?"

"Hya hya hya hya! As expected of the adamantite rank! This old man has already decided on taking the risk. I won't blame you for anything that happens."

A faint laughter could be heard from underneath Momon's helmet.

"That's expected, senior. This is the difference in in battle strength—I'm strong. Stronger than everyone present. That's why I'm adamantite ranked."

Overwhelming conceit, and an attitude as if looking down from above. However, not a single bit of unpleasantness was felt by the workers present. This was obviously due to the impressive pressure emitted from the man called Momon. His words were accompanied by an overwhelming pressure which gave the impression of staring at death itself, thus the words felt as if they contained the power of persuasion.

"…How amazing."

"…Aye, really amazing."

Most of the people in the audience couldn't help but let out their voice due to the emitted pressure.

There were many women that fall for strong and powerful men. In terms of respect and admiration, many men were also fascinated by the strength of the strong. Like moths attracted to flames, the people living in this world of blood and steel couldn't help being mesmerised by that irresistible charm, even though they were aware that they would get burned if they got too close.

"Hya hya hya! Looks like there won't be anyone here objecting to you being adamantite ranked! Although I've said it this way, since it's a rare opportunity, I will still carry on despite knowing that I will lose. The carriages over here are in the way. Can we use the empty area over there instead, butler?"

Having received the permission from the butler, Parupatra took the lead and went over to the empty courtyard. All of the workers followed. The adventurers and the butler also came.

"Judging from what Elder had said, it seems like we won't be able to witness much."

"—That man seems really strong."

"Uun, not just strong, more like outrageously strong. It feels as if he's stronger than any of the other adamantite-ranked adventurer teams in the Empire."

"Seems like it. The only reason the adventurer team 'Silver Canary' has the adamantite rank is because all of their members are people with rare professions. Although they possess strange abilities, their actual strength isn't quite up there yet. 'Eight Ripples' made it to where they are mainly due to relying on their numbers and spectacular teamwork."

'Silver Canary' was a team lead by a Bard who had reached the heroic tier, while its members had many strange professions. 'Eight Ripples' had been founded by nine members, but due to their numbers, they were often regarded as a team whose individual members were not at the adamantite level yet. However, if it was about teamwork, they were known to excel beyond everything other adamantite-ranked teams could achieve.

Nevertheless, all of them were considered as having achieved the impossible feat of ascending into the realm of adamantite-bearers.

Whispers of such discussions could be heard from the team members from behind.

The contents of the discussions wasn't only limited to the previous remarks. If one listened carefully, many things could be heard. The most discussed topic was how long Parupatra could last, things like that. There wasn't a single person who believed he could defeat Momon. The primary reason for that was that the man known as Momon had emitted an amount of pressure only those of the adamantite rank would be able to create, even if it had been only for a brief moment.

While Hekkeran was deep in thought, someone walked up to his side. Considering the metallic sounds that were produced, it was obvious who it was.

"What does Greenham think about the upcoming fight between the two?"

"Although I feel bad to say this, but I just can't see how Elder can win. At this point, what's left is simply to see to what extend Elder can take it to, that's all. Does thee plan on going next after Elder?"

"No way, please give me a break. What about you?"

"I will also give up. I'll be satisfied with just witnessing the strength of a superior warrior. However, I hope to be able to receive some guidance on the sword during this trip."

"I'm also thinking about doing that— Oh!"

Arriving at the courtyard, Momon and Parupatra began to back away from each other as they started readying their stance.

Parupatra's gaze was definitely not something an ordinary old man would be capable of making, they were definitely the eyes of a warrior who was used to combat.

The atmosphere gradually changed to one filled with killing intent, the peacefulness surrounding the courtyard no longer exists.

As the audience was watching, the tension created a feeling of anxiety and some of them even started to sweat.

"…Oh my, not good. Elder seems to be completely serious."

Greenham, who was standing by Hekkeran's side, unconsciously exposed his true self.

"Against an opponent of the adamantite rank, it's understandable for him to go at it as if his life is on the line—"

While replying, Hekkeran shifted his line of sight towards the warrior in black, trying to put himself into the elder's position, and gasped.

He couldn’t feel a single thing from Momon.

Both of his hands were lowered by his sides without showing any signs of taking any defensive actions, meeting the bloodlust head on as if it was nothing. It was completely as if he was facing against a harmless child holding a sword, that kind of feeling.

"Ahriya! Amazing! Confronted with that kind of killing intent and not showing any signs of reaction. It’s impossible for him to not notice this amount of bloodthirst being emitted, could it be that he’s reached the very peak of the warrior, the ultimate mental state of nothingness!?"

"Swordless Heart? Or has his mental state reached the Realm of Cloud and Water? To be able to stand so fearless like that when there’s that much of a difference between the weapons of the two, he must really be confident of his skills… really, how terrifying. "

The spear in Parupatra’s hands was a magic item made from the tooth of a dragon, whereas the weapon that Momon was holding was a wooden staff borrowed earlier from one of the adventurers. No matter how you look at it, it was definitely not imbued with any kind of magic. Weapons imbued with magic could increases their sharpness, boost the user’s abilities and provide various additional effects. Looking at nothing but the weapons, Parupatra had an overwhelming advantage.

"No, I don’t think so. Although it’s true that there’s a strong difference in terms of weapons, Momon-sam’s armor should be well above Elder’s in terms of magical properties. Also, the additional magic items equipped should be better as well. The overall difference isn’t that large, but Momon-san should hold the advantage."

"Don’t you think it’s a bit early to come to a conclusion? I’ve heard that the number of magic items in Elder’s possession is far greater than what most adamantite-ranked adventurers could possibly have.. Elder has been adventuring for a long period of time, and has completed countless requests. If we consider just the amount of payment he’s received, no-one in the Empire has more than him!"

"No, no, wait up—"

"The one that should wait should be—"

While the two of them were still arguing, the tension within the courtyard had reached its climax and the first sparks of battle finally started to appear.

"Well then, let's go!?"

"There are still important things that needs to be done after this. Don't make it too hard for yourself and come at me, senior—"

Without even finishing the sentence, Parupatra charged towards Momon with a speed that most people would never imagine an eighty-year old man to be capable of. Smooth and with strength, he completed the action with such fluidity that his opponent Momon still hadn't raised the staff in his hands.

"「Dragon Fang Thrust」!"

Hekkeran's eyes widened in surprise at Parupatra's sudden use of a martial arts at the very beginning of the fight.

A consecutive two-hit piercing attack with the spear bending like the tooth of a dragon. On top of dealing additional damage based on the attributes imbued by user, this martial art technique also included a homing effect which increased the chance of dealing critical damage. Using 'Piercing Strike' as the base, this technique was something Parupatra had created forty years ago. A well-balanced technique known by many and even now a lot of people were still studying it.

In addition to the 'Dragon Fang Thrust', Parupatra layered an additional 'Blue Dragon Fang Thrust' on top, which caused extra lightning damage.

Just what is that old man thinking! Even though we have healing magic at hand here, who really goes all out like that?

The effect of the used martial arts was that even a minor scratch would cause a considerable amount of lightning damage. It was most suited when fighting against opponents wearing armor made of metal. His decision to use this attack showed Parupatra's seriousness.

However, for an attack that was known to be troublesome to deal with for those wearing metal armor, Momon easily avoided it like it was nothing. His actions made it seem as if he was wearing an armor as light as feather. The sluggish movements that normally should have been caused from when wearing full body armor did not show at all. What made it even more surprising was that instead of making excessive movements like leaping backwards, Momon was able to evade the incoming attack with minimum effort while standing still.

"Impossible! Just how good are his kinetic vision and physical capabilities?"

"—「Gale Acceleration」!"

Parupatra responded immediately with another martial art.

That old fart is going way over the top! Has his brain already become a fossil?

"「Dragon Fang Thrust」!"

Using the same technique as before, Parupatra struck once more at Momon. The blade of his spear was brimming with a white layer of coldness which came from the 'White Dragon Fang Thrust' he used this time.

A four hit consecutive attack that didn't give the opponent any breathing room—

A commotion could be heard from amongst the audience watching.

Of course. Even an attack like that wasn't able to land a single hit or scratch on Momon's armor.

Parupatra quickly leaped away to create some distance from Momon. Sweat started to build up on his forehead. It wasn't from exhausting his stamina, but rather from the sheer amount of mental pressure he received during the face off against death.

"Amazing!"

"—Stronger than Hekkeran."

"Obviously, Arche. Don't use me as a comparison. What you're seeing there is the highest of the adventurers. The absolute peak of everything. The power of an adamantite-ranked adventurer."

"Well then, looks like it's my turn to attack."

Momon slowly raised his staff, entering a stance. In contrast, Parupatra rested his spear on his shoulder, relaxing his posture. He was giving up, having completely lost any will to fight.

"Magnificent. I give up, I resign. Forget about winning, this old man can't even put a scratch on your armor."

"…Is that so."

Towards Parupatra who announced his loss, the majority of the audience gave off a "uooooh" sound as they sighed. It was without a doubt, an overwhelming victory by Momon, as if he was an adult who played around with a child.

Discussions such as "which martial-arts-school did the footwork technique used by Momon belong to?" started to appear as the overly excited audience began to share their thoughts with each other. Not caring about these things, Hekkeran and Greenham walked towards Parupatra who was busy wiping away his sweat while conversing with Momon.

"Already done, senior?"

It feels as if the atmosphere and speaking tone suddenly changed.

"…I thought you wanted to display your real ability."

"…hya hya hya. That would be too much for an old man like me. What I've shown is already my real ability, Momon-dono."

"—Ah, my apologies for being disrespectful."

"No need to apologize, but to be honest I am quite sad about it. Also, you don't need to be so modest with your words. What we old timers respect is strength and not who has lived longer. To be treated with so much respect by someone as overwhelmingly strong as you just doesn't make me feel good."

"…I see. So be it then. However, to just end it here like this without letting me even take a swing leaves a bad aftertaste for me. If there's going to be a next time, I'll be the one to start. Well then, I will have to get back to moving the luggage."

"There are other people already working on it. You shouldn't need to be doing that right?"

"I do not think so. No matter what kind of status I have, when a task is assigned to me, I must still finish it properly."

Having said that, Momon turned around and headed back towards the carriages. Following him was the woman possessing peerless beauty. Hekkeran and Greenham whose path crossed by couldn't stop their eyes from being glued to them once more.

Entranced by the silhouette of the larger than life's back of Momon.

"Hya hya, you're making the face of a man wanting to ask questions."

"—Elder, what was your thoughts on this?"

Parupatra's wrinkled face started to distort, as if wanting to smile

bitterly.

"Very strong. No, that should be as expected due to being adamantite ranked. However, I never imagined to what extent that was. The moment we clashed, I got the feeling that no matter how I attack, I would never be able to hit him."

Hekkeran had the exact same feeling. Every single attack of his would probably be evaded by the man named Momon, and then the counterattack would come. Even if he was able to land a hit after using the best tricks he could think of, the image of his attack being repelled by that armor still appeared in Hekkeran's mind. Parupatra, who experienced it firsthand, must have received an even stronger impression.

"So that's… the adamantite rank huh?"

"That's right. That's the so called adamantite level. A realm where only few can ever reach. Aahh, truly magnificently stunning. A height that you cannot reach and touch… Well, are you guys satisfied from witnessing this?"

"Without a doubt! Thanks to being an observer, I was able to see the whole thing in detail. If I had been the one fighting, I would have never been able to calmly observe everything. Although I have to apologize for saying this to Elder, but personally, I really wanted to see the Momon-dono the moment he was about to attack."

"That wouldn't have been possible. Momon-dono never had the intention to attack in the first place. He didn't even show any fighting spirit. Most likely, it was just as he had said, that he wasn't used to holding back. If he had really attacked, Elder most likely would have lost his life."

If it was said like that, it would indeed sound quite arrogant. Elder Parupatra was also a warrior of considerable strength, a veteran that should not be underestimated.

However, it was exactly because having achieved it showed just how

strong adamantite rank adventurers truly are.

"That can't be helped. There's a huge difference in strength between this old man and that person. Even though I was quite unhappy about it, there is nothing I can say after he was able to evade all of these attacks like nothing

That was what it meant to be strong.

Choosing a weapon that he wasn't familiar with, where the weight and balance was completely different, showed just how much confidence he had in his own abilities. The difference between the two was just that big.

With a final sentence of "so tiring, so tiring", Parupatra turned and walked away towards the carriages.

As Parupatra's figure gradually got further and further away, Hekkeran heard him utter the following words.

"Even during my prime I was unable to reach that level, so that is the adamantite rank huh… too distant to ever reach."

Parupatra's figure seemed much smaller when compared to that of Momon's, which gave off an overwhelming pressure.

"So that's the highest rank… adamantite."

"Yeah. Truly amazing."

Only the sound of agreement could be heard from those two.

Part 2

On a stone-paved road in Arwintar, a carriage sped by like the wind.

The creature pulling the luxurious carriage was an eight-legged beast, a Sleipnir. Two skilled-looking warriors were seated on the front platform, on the roof of the carriage. The area where the luggage was usually stored had been modified to seat a group of four magic casters and archers, who were watching the surrounding with wary eyes.

It could be described as a mobile stronghold traveling under high security in broad daylight. And of course, the one riding inside was of a fittingly high status.

Just by looking at the emblem on the side of the carriage, which consisted of three overlapping staffs, everyone with a certain level of knowledge/culture would be able to tell who was sitting inside and who the owner of this carriage was. As such, the knights standing guard did not make any sound.

There were three men inside the carriage. All of them wore robes and were dressed like magic casters.

Although all three were famous figures within the Empire, even among them there was a clear difference in their attitude and status. The white haired elderly man clearly had the highest status among them.

Similar to how Gazef Stronoff was renowned as a warrior, there was no magic caster who was more famous than this man. This elderly man was the most powerful magic caster in the Empire, ‘Tri Arts’ Fluder Paradyne.

Opposite Fluder were two of his disciples, both of whom could use magic up to the 4th tier.

As though he could no longer endure the heavy atmosphere after setting off from the Imperial capital, one of the disciple sheepishly said:

“Master, what should we do about his Imperial Majesty’s orders?”

Silence took over the carriage once again. The moment they thought that was the case, Fluder answered in a deep and calm voice.

“If his Imperial Majesty wishes it, we as his vassals can only carry out his orders and begin our investigation. However, it is too risky to investigate using magical means. Should we start by studying the archives or conducting a demon summoning? In the end, we still need to gather information.”

“Are you saying that even you do not know, Master?”

Fluder closed his eyes and opened them several seconds later.

“My knowledge is lacking. I don’t know anything about the powerful demon Jaldabaoth.”

About one month ago, a group of demons assaulted the Kingdom’s capital. According to the intelligence they gathered, the commander Jaldabaoth and his maid servants were horrifying beings from another plane of existence.

Because of the demon crisis, the annual invasion against the Kingdom hadn’t been launched this year. Thinking normally, the Empire should have taken advantage of the situation and attacked the Kingdom while they were still exhausted from the demon invasion.

However, there were two reasons why the Empire waged war against the Kingdom.

The first reason was to exhaust the resources of the Kingdom. Unlike the Empire that formed standing armies, the Kingdom conscripted their soldiers. Hence, the Kingdom would lose in terms of quality every time the Empire mobilized its forces, so they had to make it up with the quantity of their troops. That was the reason why they picked the harvesting seasons to wage war. The farmers would be conscripted and unable to harvest their crops, which was a long term plan to sap the resources of the Kingdom.

The other reason was to weaken the power of the nobles within the

Empire. During the war, they imposed special taxes on nobles who opposed the Emperor and drained them of their money. If they refused, they would be would be charged with treason. In the end, the only difference was tightening the noose on their necks or killing them for expressing a wrong idea.

As those were the reasons, the Kingdom which was already spent from the battle could be left alone— that was the conclusion of Emperor Jircniv. He had pulled the fangs of most of the nobles anyway.

However, there was still one problem.

Where was Jaldabaoth now, the one who committed atrocities befitting the title of a demon? And what kind of existence was this being that created such calamity?

It was only natural for the order to investigate Jaldabaoth to fall on Fluder, the most outstanding magic caster in the Empire.

“And the one who defeated Jaldabaoth, ‘Dark Hero’ Momon and his team mate ‘Beautiful Princess’ Nabe. How fascinating. And the mysterious magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown. Are all the hidden heroes starting to make their move? Maybe a fierce battle similar to the fight against the demon god two hundred years ago will happen once again.”

“...Will that really happen?”

“I have no idea, but only a fool would make preparations after the fact. Being ready before it happens is the action of a wise man.”

The carriage finally reached its destination.

The vast territory was surrounded by thick, high walls with several watchtowers overlooking it, guarding against dangers coming from both outside and inside. Multiple chosen knights —from the elite 1st Knight Order that was the best out of the eight Knight Orders of the Empire— formed teams with magic casters and made regular patrols.

Up in the sky were the personal guards under the direct jurisdiction of the Emperor, imperial air guards mounted on flying beasts, and even high-level magic casters using flight magic.

This was the symbol of the Empire's might, and the place where past emperors had invested the most efforts in, the Magic Ministry.

Production of magic equipment for the knights, development of new spells, raising the standard of living through magic experiments, the essence of the Empire's magic knowledge was all here. And the man who was overall in charge—although someone else was the minister of magic—was Fluder.

The carriage moved through the territory, and finally stopped before the innermost tower.

One common thing about the various buildings they passed by was the large number of people entering and exiting. However, there was hardly anyone going in and out of this tower. In contrast, the security at the entrance was beyond that of the other buildings.

First was how the security knights looked. They were not from the 1st Knight Order that could be seen everywhere in the vicinity.

They wore full plate armor imbued with magic, holding magic shields and had magic weapons hanging at their waist. Their crimson capes, sewn with the emblem of the Empire, were magical as well.

The imbued magic might not be that powerful, but such equipment was not something normal knights were outfitted with, even in the Empire.

These elite knights were the Imperial Earth Guards under the direct command of the Emperor.

The magic casters beside them were equally formidable. They were veterans and proficient in battles, emitting an aura that could rival veteran warriors.

And there was more. Four 2.5m tall stone golems guarded the entrance. With no need for food nor rest and never lazing off, they were most suited for security.

This place, which had a security system that was on par with the one protecting the emperor, only allowed entry to magic casters who had reached the latter half of their 3rd tier magic studies, those with special circumstances and magic casters proficient in research.

After responding to the most respectful salutes of the knights and magic casters with a gentle wave, he entered the tower. He reached the top of a bowl shaped space after going through a straight passage. Many magic casters were working hastily. The highest ranking magic caster rushed hurriedly to Fluder.

“Did something happen?”

“Nothing to report, Master.”

After gulping, the disciple squeezed out an answer that bore both good and bad tidings.

Fluder nodded with a complicated expression as he looked at the thirty disciples he had personally trained— known as the chosen thirty disciples. The most renowned one was his deputy in charge of this place.

“Is that so, we couldn’t link it to natural occurrence?”

“Yes master. We couldn’t link it to the existence of the lowest tier of undead, the skeleton. Right now we are conducting experiments by placing it next to corpses to see if zombies will be raised naturally.”

“Hmmm...”

Fluder stroked his long beard as he watched the scene developing before him.

There were dozens of skeletons performing farm work.

Raising hoes and swinging it down. The movements of all the skeletons were perfectly in sync. If one were to look from the side, they would only see one skeleton moving.

The movement was synchronized so perfectly that it looked just like a tactical RPG. This was the true nature of the grand project the Empire was conducting in secret. ‘Using undead as labourers'.

The undead had no need for nourishment or rest, and would not become tired. Low tier undead weren’t sentient, so they could only perform tasks as ordered and couldn’t do anything complicated. However, if there was someone giving instructions from the side, the problem would be solved.

Deploying the undead to the farms would yield great benefits, such as reducing the manpower required and a price drop for farm produce.. Farmlands could be expanded, and injuries and death to humans could be prevented. It wasn’t too much to say this was a grandiose project.

There were similar proposals that used summoned monsters or created Golems as manpower, but after considering the cost, efficiency and optimization, the use of undead was considered to be the best choice.

But those who opposed it —especially the group led by priests— were of the opinion that using the undead which were the manifestation of the hatred of life, was corrupting the souls of the dead.

It was different when you looked at it from the viewpoint of the religious.

Even if the undead were risen from the corpses of criminals, according to religious teachings, the sins of the criminal were absolved the moment they were executed, and turning them into undead was desecration. It would be hard to convince those who

thought that way.

If they were facing troubles with food, with many dying from famine, it would be easier to persuade them. However, the food supply of the Empire was ample and there were no problems in terms of labourers as well.

And that was the reason why the priests opposed this project.

However, the goal of this project was the strengthening of the Empire's military might. By leaving the production lines to the undead and freeing up the manpower for other areas, it would eventually lead to a larger pool of people from which excellent knights could be drawn.

What was left was the unease of the human labourers over job security, and the doubts over the obedience of the undead. Also, in places with a large number of undead, the balance between the dead and the living might crumble, leading to the creation of even more powerful undead. It was an obvious source of unease for people who listened to the sermons of the priests.

This facility existed in order to conduct experiments and dispel such unease.

"The underlying reason is still not clear, huh?"

"Yes, my humble apologies, Master."

Why do the undead rise naturally. Finding out the underlying reason was important for the future.

The place said to be covered in fog throughout the year and only cleared up when the Kingdom and Empire clash in battle, the cursed place known as Kattse plains. Where some of the strongest undead, like the Skeletal Dragon which was immune to all magic, appeared with incredibly high probability.

Although the Empire had plans of annexing the region around E-

Rantel under its rule, it was reluctant in taking the place where the undead rises at such a high rate. Hence, they needed to figure out how long it took for an undead to rise, which would definitely help in controlling them. It might even be possible to stop the emergence of the undead once and for all.

“Is that so, I understand.”

Leaving his relieved deputy in charge aside, Fluder started walking around the bowl shaped room.

When he reached the door on the opposite side, the number of disciples following behind Fluder increased.

In front of the door opened by the knight guarding it, the line of people continued advancing. It was a passage like before, but the presence of humans was gradually draining away. The air smelled like dust and the light seemed to be losing the fight against the darkness.

The passage with the disturbing aura extended straight ahead and connected to a staircase that spiraled down. As they passed through the doors along the way, the time between the clatter of boots which echoed in the tower was rather short. They only went five levels below ground. However, the heavy atmosphere made it seem longer.

The reason wasn’t simply because they were underground. This was evidenced by the tense expressions of everyone, including Fluder, due to their nervousness.

At the lowest level, everyone’s faces were twisted, the tension was so high it was no surprise to say that they were ready for battle.

Everyone was focusing on a set of heavy doors. It was a door that seemed to be separating another world. To keep it from being destroyed or opened easily, it was fortified with several physical and magical defenses. It was a door that must never be breached.

The numerous sets of heavy doors they passed on their way here was

telling of the danger in this place. Those doors were meant to buy time if something dangerous were to happen here, and also had the underlying meaning of segregating this area.

Fluder warned his disciples with a stiff voice.

“Do not be careless.”

The warning was short and simple, which was telling of how terrifying it was.

The magic caster who followed him nodded deeply. Fluder repeated his warning every time he came here. Even though they knew what was in there, their expression didn’t ease.

Sealed in here was the ultimate undead. If it was unleashed, there was no question a horrible tragedy would befall the Empire.

Several people started casting protection spells. It wasn’t just physical defense spells, they cast mental protection magic too. After ample preparation time, Fluder looked at his disciples once again to gauge their resolve.

After nodding, he chanted the unsealing spell.

With the power of the spell, the heavy door opened slowly with a ‘gong’.

Something akin to cold air spilled out from the dark interior, and several of the disciples tightened their shoulders due to the cold. Even with magic items to protect against the environment, the hatred for life from the thing inside was enough to send a chill down their spine.

The sound of someone gulping was exceptionally loud.

“Let’s go.”

In response to Fluder's voice, the disciples made multiple magic illumination lights, driving away the darkness within the room. The receding darkness seemed to be hiding outside the light, making the surrounding even darker— that's how it felt.

With Fluder taking the lead, the group walked towards the room where the aura of death lingered.

Part of the reason was its narrowness, and the room was illuminated immediately by the magical lights.

What lay within was a giant pillar that reached the ceiling. That tombstone-like object was very prominent. However, there was something bound by chains that drew even more attention.

It was completely bound by chains that were thicker than a thumb. The ends of the chains were secured by boulders, and large cast iron balls were tied to each of its limbs.

It was impossible for any being to move in such a situation. These excessive restraints reflected how wary they were of this opponent. That was why some of the group were still uneasy despite seeing the thick chains. They were certain that this being could shatter its bonds and gain freedom easily.

It had the appearance of a knight wearing a black full plate armour, but the armor was very different compared to the equipment of humans.

The first prominent feature was its massive body. Its height was easily over two meters.

Next would be its black full plate armour. On it were engravings that reminded people of blood vessels, and spikes that symbolized violence were everywhere. Demon-like horns sprouted from its helmet, and the face could be clearly seen. Inside the helmet was a rotten face. The hollow eye sockets glowed bright red from its hatred of the living and its thirst for carnage.

That was not a living being, but something dead. That was the only way it was possible for it to radiate such hatred for the living.

“Death… Knight.”

One of the disciples who had come here for the first time mumbled the name of the legendary undead. Having been relegated to the realm of legends, the name of this undead was not well known.

The red glow in the eyes of the Death Knight glimmered, its gaze seemed to be licking the magic casters before it. No, the instantaneous action shouldn’t be noticeable at all. However, the aura that made them tremble gave the magic casters the illusion it was looking at them.

The ones accompanying them could at least use 3rd tier magic, a group of elites, but right now, they couldn’t stop their teeth from rattling.

Even with the mental protection spells in place, the fear didn’t stop welling up. The fact that no one had attempted to run away showed that the magic was still effective.

“—Control your will. A weak soul will be greeted with death.”

Fluder warned as he approached the Death Knight. In response, the Death Knight unleashed its bloodlust and exerted strength through its limbs.

The chain creaked as if they were moaning, but its body only moved slightly.

Fluder reached out towards the Death Knight.

Magical light drove back the darkness, and the sound of Fluder chanting magic echoed. A modified version of ‘Summon Undead 6th Tier’, Fluder’s original magic.

“—Obey.”

The magic was cast—As though it was melting into the surroundings, Fluder’s soft voice withered away.

In contrast, the eyes of the Death Knight were still filled with the hatred of the living. Anyone could tell the spell was a failure.

“...We still can’t control it, huh.”

Fluder’s voice was filled with regret. Even after five years, he could not establish control over this undead.

This monster had been discovered in the Kattse Plains, where the undead roamed.

A squad of the Empire’s knights encountered and engaged it as part of their purging mission, even though they had never seen this type of undead before. Seconds later, they realized this was out of their league. The faces of the Empire Knights, known for their discipline and strength, were filled with terror and despair.

An overwhelmingly one sided fight—the opponent was too strong.

After mowing down dozens of knights like grass, the knights realized the limit of their abilities and started to retreat.

And of course, they couldn’t leave a monster like that alone. Especially after they witnessed the killed knights turning into undead ghouls, it was easy to imagine the spreading damage if they gave their opponent time.

After a series of debate, the top leaders of the Empire decided to send in their ace— the greatest combat unit of the Empire, Fluder and his disciples.

And the result was the capture of the Death Knight, with Fluder and his team obtaining victory. However, Fluder only won because the

Death Knight did not have any way of countering flight magic. By utilizing carpet bombing—repeatedly throwing 'Fire Ball' from above — to weaken the Death Knight's movement and defeated it. Captivated by its power, Fluder captured and transported it to this place.

Right now, it was bound by multiple spells, magic items and methods — They invested in all sorts of ways to dominate the undead just because Fluder wanted to control this Death Knight.

"What a pity… If I can control it, I will surpass that magic caster and become the greatest ever in history."

Surpassing one of the Thirteen Heroes, the necromancer Rigrit Bers Coural. Surpass her by leaps and bounds.

Actually, Fluder wasn't obsessed with the pursuit of power. What he was after was to peer into the abyss of magic. This was just a process towards his ultimate goal.

However, his disciples didn't know and consoled him.

"I think Master has already surpassed that hero."

"That's right. The Thirteen Heroes are a relic of the past. They couldn't win against Master who is at the cutting edge of new magic techniques."

"I also feel that Master had already surpassed the Thirteen Heroes. If Master could control the Death Knight, the Empire would gain the greatest fighting power."

"They say the power of one could not defeat the power of many, but that is just because the power of that individual is still too weak. This Death Knight is truly the strongest being."

No one could see Fluder's wry smile since he was standing at the very front. Only the eyes of the Death Knight saw it.

“Even Master couldn’t dominate… this Death Knight. Just how powerful is he?”

“That… remains unknown. Theoretically, it could be dominated. Does anyone have any idea what are we lacking?”

After some time, the answer was still silence.

The undead could be dominated through magic, but the only one who succeeded in doing so was one of the Thirteen Heroes. Fluder was powerful enough to dominate undead that had a rather high level and he was powerful enough that he might just be able to dominate the Death Knight before him.

However, that was just in theory, dominating the undead requires a rather complicated process. Basically, the control and destruction of undead should be done by priests using the power of god. By using magic in place of the power of god, it was natural for all sorts of problems to arise.

“...I don’t mean to offend Master…”

One of the disciples spoke in a heavy manner, and Fluder gestured for him to continue.

“Maybe Master isn’t powerful enough? This Death Knight might exist because it had been summoned by magic of the 7th tier...”

“That is a good observation.”

“I heard the adventurers use numbers to gauge the difficulty level of monsters. How about using that?”

“But their gauge is very vague, I heard that the age and size of the monsters will render the numbers meaningless.”

Another disciple spoke.

“Apart from unknown monsters, there is nothing clearer and simpler than that. And since they represent the accumulated experiences of the adventurers, they shouldn’t be too far off.”

“Wouldn’t that be meaningless to a legendary monster like the Death Knight?”

“By the way Master, does the secret book chronicling countless monsters mention such a monster?”

“No.” Fluder stroked his beard. “Leaving the complete Eryuentiu aside, the version open to the public is useless.”

One disciple asked another a question. Their voices were soft, but it seemed loud in the quiet room.

“What is Eryuentiu?”

“Isn’t that the name of a city?”

“I heard about that. But what a queer name.”

“Ahh… I looked it up once, it means ‘the tree in the center of the world’ in an ancient tongue.”

Warning the disciples who were speaking casually, Fluder knocked his staff on the ground. This was a place imprisoning a legendary level undead, not some place where you could let down your guard.

Obeying the warning of the master of the room, ‘silence’ returned. The only sound was the squirming of the Death Knight as it tried to break its bonds.

“Regrettably, there is nothing else we can do here. At least for today. Let’s go.”

“Yes Master.”

After receiving several relieved replies, Fluder started moving away from the Death Knight..

Even Fluder had a different pace comparing his arrival and departure. With the pressure of the Death Knight's gaze on his back, he unconsciously sped up. It was the same for the disciples.

Walking ahead, Fluder remembered the name one of his disciples had mentioned.

"Eryuentiu."

The capital of the nation founded by the Eight Greed Kings, and also the last city that remained. At the same time, it was a city guarded by thirty guards equipped with overpowered magic weapons.

If he had a magic item from the Eight Greed Kings, Fluder was sure his magic skills would rise another level. It would never fall into the hands of others, the only exception being the few items the Thirteen Heroes had been allowed to take with them.

A dark flame flickered in Fluder's heart.

The Thirteen Heroes. Heroes of the past. Fluder was someone who could rival them, but they received permission while he didn't. He didn't understand what he was lacking.

Fluder waved away the flickering flame and consoled himself. His current status and what he had achieved was on par with the accomplishments of the Thirteen Heroes. No, in the hearts of the Empire's magic casters, Fluder had already surpassed them in status.

But the dark flames of jealousy couldn't be extinguished so easily. He was not jealous of their power, talent or strength, but of their chance to peek into the abyss of magic before him.

Fluder was the best magic caster. This was a fact acknowledged by everybody, and the only ones that could be compared to him were the Thirteen Heroes of the past. However, he couldn't dominate the

Death Knight, and could only use—according to rumours —six of the ten tiers of magic.

He was far from reaching the abyss of magic.

And he was old.

Fluder was a mental spell magic caster using one of the system of the Wizardry-based class— Forbidden Arts. By using spells that were taboo, he stopped his aging. Of course, it was a complicated spell considering Fluder's level of training, but he forced it through by using a combination of ritual and spells.

However, his method of making the impossible possible had a flaw. Fluder, who shouldn't be aging anymore after casting the spell perfectly, could still feel himself aging slowly.

It was still manageable for now, but with the passage of time, his end would come one day.

That's right. Fluder would die before seeing the abyss of magic.

If someone else had done so before him, he might be able to arrive at this stage earlier, but with his lack of predecessors, he had to pave his own path.

Fluder looked at the disciples around him.

The ones walking on the path paved by the figure known as Fluder.

With fuel added to the flames of jealousy, the fire burned brighter.

He, the most talented one of everyone present, how much time had he taken to reach the stage his disciples were at? No, without even thinking about it, he was definitely older than those disciples of his. Someone who was taught and the pioneer who paved the way, that was how wide the difference was.

Why didn't he have a master?

Fluder tried changing his way of thinking.

—That was fine too. Leaving his name in the history books as a pioneer. The magic casters who reached new heights after Fluder would need to thank Fluder for their achievements. His disciples were his treasures. If there was just one person who become greater than I am, it would be attributed to my power—

As he thought about that, Fluder remembered a disciple he once had. If it was that girl, how far could she go?

"—Arche Eeb Rile Furt."

An excellent child. Learning 2nd tier magic at such a tender age and so close to 3rd tier. If she had continued, it was possible that she would eventually reach Fluder's realm one day. But in the end, she gave up being a disciple…

Back then, he had only thought how foolish and disappointing it was.

"Such a pity."

Maybe he allowed a big catch to get away.

Where is that child now? He thought about searching for her. If she could use 3rd tier spells, it was possible to guarantee a certain level of status for her.

That might be so, but he had a job to do right now.

Fluder uttered the code word and the heavy door opened.

After coming out, the disciples around him took deep breaths with the same frequency. The air where the aura of the Death Knight lingered was too heavy. If they did not do this, it would be unbearable.

“Master!”

A low, rough voice sounded out. That was one of his disciples, a renowned adventurer. Due to his experience, he had been appointed the deputy director of the security within the Magic Ministry.

“...What is the matter? Is something wrong?”

“No, nothing is wrong, just that some adamantite-ranked adventurers were requesting an audience with Master.”

Fluder looked at that man strangely.

They hadn’t made any appointments. As the finest magic caster in the Empire, Fluder had all sorts of duties on top of his research, and was a very busy man. If someone sought an audience out of the blue, he could only shake his head. Only the Emperor could see Fluder as he pleased.

That might be so, but it was too early to reject them. Adamantite level adventurers were heroes, not people that could simply be ignored. That was the same for Fluder. They were one of the few sources he could obtain rare artifacts from, so he couldn’t treat them lightly.

“Is it an honoured visit from the ‘Silver Canaries’? Or esteemed guests from ‘Eight Ripples’?”

He stated the name of the two adamantite ranked adventuring partiers within the Empire.

But the disciple shook his head.

“No, it is a two man team known as ‘Darkness’. They showed their adamantite plate as proof.”

“What!?”

The famous adventurers team ‘Darkness’ from the Kingdom. With just the two of them, they had accomplished numerous hero level tasks. They had even taken on Jaldabaoth during the Royal Capital’s crisis and defeated him.

Why were such figures visiting him? He had several questions, but the idea of discussing magic with the high-tier magic caster ‘Beautiful Princess’ made him threw his doubts away.

However, as a vassal of the Emperor, he still remembered the task assigned to him by his liege Jircniv.

He would ask about that after his meeting with them. As he thought about that, Fluder said to his disciple:

“Please show our guests in. I will be right there after tidying up.”

Part 3

“Ah, there really are ruins here, that surprised me. I didn’t think they were bluffing when they offered that kind of payment, but it’s still hard to believe there are ruins to be explored in the middle of the plains.”

His comrades watching the ruins agreed with Hekkeran’s monologue.

Although the ruins appeared to be a cemetery, the ground seemed be sinking slightly into the earth, as if the entire area was depressed inwards, giving the impression like that of a basin.

The reason it was unexplored was probably because of the grasslands all around it. There was nothing like the relics of an ancient city to draw the eyes of adventurers to it. Another thing was the existence of several knolls in the vicinity that appeared to be hiding the existence of the ruins, making it hard to notice. Although the roof of the building in the middle protruded just a little, it couldn’t be seen if

you didn't view it from this spot.

Some of the earth surrounding the ruins had fallen off, revealing part of the walls. That was why the ruins had been discovered. That was what the representatives of each team concluded.

"That seems about right. By the way, I'm getting a little excited. The possibility of uncovering amazing things by exploring the ruins are really high."

"Who knows? Well, there are no problems with this place. At least there aren't any dangerous monsters. Rather, what made me uneasy was the place the client marked out as the base camp."

Setting up camp was the best choice for a place like the plains.

The site was enclosed by hills and couldn't be seen from a distance. If they paid attention to the usage of lights, it would be difficult to notice their presence.

And that was why—it seemed scary.

"But really, why did our client know of a place like this?"

The best guess would be that this area was the most suitable spot for setting up camp, and the ruins were spotted by the client when they made camp. That made the most sense.

However, that gave rise to new questions. Why were they were setting up camp in such a far off place? Furthermore, it was a noble from the Empire camping within the territory of the Kingdom.

"—I heard there's a large underground organization in the Kingdom. I think it's called Eight Fingers. They seem to be a troublesome bunch."

"They seem to have secret dealings with the Empire. They possess substantial power within the Kingdom, but it would be problematic

to investigate further. I heard someone from my thieves' contacts complain about it."

Imina pressed down on her hair that was being blown by the wind and Arche followed suit. Roberdyck mumbled.

"I heard something about drugs. Those are good if used appropriately. However, the people who turn it into a way to enslave the weak, are really off putting."

He couldn't help raising his voice a little.

After all, Roberdyck had become a worker in order to help the weak.

"This has nothing to do with the request this time, so let's stop the baseless assumptions. Anyway, Arche's investigation concluded that the client is fine, right?"

Arche mumbled that the investigation might not have been thorough enough to dig up anything carefully hidden, but agreed.

"Everyone, you all understand right?"

"Of course. I won't say it before the other teams. After all, the workers might have accepted a secret request from the Eight Fingers. The other teams might be related to that organization, but we can't make baseless accusations. At least, not before this request is completed."

"I don't know how much blood and tears our money's been stained with."

"—No matter how dirty it is, money is money and we have to live off it."

After glancing at Roberdyck, Arche breathed in deeply to cool herself off.

“—Sorry, I said something rude.”

“No, I am the one who almost blurted out something impolite, I beg your pardon.”

“—Please don’t mind me. You didn’t say anything after all. Please keep it in your heart. I value money more than my conscience, but—” Arche raised her hand to emphasize what she was going to say next. “I won’t let my comrades do anything unethical. I’ve already witnessed several people die because of their greed.”

“I believe you, Arche.”

Arche nodded and no one said anything else. They could communicate their thoughts without words. It was because they had quarreled like this several times before, that they had come to trust each other.

“So what do you think? My gut feeling is that the possibility of that cemetery being under the control of something is high.”

Hekkeran stared at the grass that had been neatly trimmed. The statues of angels and goddesses could only be described as beautiful, and were obviously maintained regularly.

On the other hand, the trees sprouting everywhere gave it a gloomy atmosphere.

The arrangement of the cemetery wasn’t orderly, but scattered messily like the teeth of an ugly witch, which contrasted strongly with the cleanliness of this place.

Something was taking care of this area. And it was not a normal being. An ominous chill gnawed at their stomachs.

Hekkeran waved away the chill and focused on the gigantic structure. There were four crypts at each point of the compass, with a large and elegant mausoleum sitting right in the middle. The eight warrior statues around the crypts were large, giving off a menacing feeling

that anyone who came near and desecrated this place would be executed.

“The landscape around here is very well kept. I don’t even see any moss. Someone is performing his duties seriously here, but what kind of person is he?”

All the teams—except Tenmu—thought it was strange when they read the request description.

Now that they were here and confirmed that there was nothing but plains around the area, it didn’t make sense for a cemetery to be built here.

The first thing would be the cemetery’s location. Building such a luxurious cemetery in such a far off place was baffling. It was too inconvenient.

If this was not a place to mourn the dead but to monument to immortalize the legend of great man, it would be understandable. That had been done before after all.

However, if that was the case, it felt unnatural for the historical facts and legends pertaining to the tomb to be lost. After comparing the research of all the teams, nothing related had been found, meaning there was a high chance it had been scrubbed from the history books.

That was too unnatural.

The feeling that something was out of place here stuck in their throats, becoming the reason why they were furrowing their brows.

“If there is someone here, it could become a grave matter. What should we do then?”

“...It would be annoying to drag innocent people into this.”

“—The team representatives discussed this earlier. There are no

records of ruins situated around this area. Since the nearest village is far away, the possibility that normal people are living here are low. Most likely, they're either illegal squatters or monsters. Considering the lack of footprints, they probably don't require food, or they can provide for themselves from within the ruins. We have insufficient intelligence on hand, speculating further would lock ourselves into a fixed perspective and limit our minds. So let's stop the speculations here."

Normally, the discovery of ruins would be reported to the administration of the country through the Adventurer's Guild. The discoverer was granted a limited amount of time to explore it. Due to this rule, in ruins not discovered by a national body or the Adventurer's Guild, killing illegal squatters was tolerated.

This was in accordance with the saying of rather letting a thousands innocent die than letting a single guilty person go free.

It might be an overly brutal policy, but humans were fragile beings in this world. That's why it was troubling for unknown things to build a nest near humans.

In fact, twenty years ago, a group known as Zuranon occupied a ruin and conducted horrifying experiments, which led to catastrophic results. The information about this was scant, but a small city was destroyed.

This was a rule to prevent something like that from ever happening again.

"Well, it should be undead as usual. If this place is occupied by the undead, it will be bad if we don't wipe them out and drive away the negative energy with holy power."

"It is worse than you think. If we leave the undead alone, there is a chance of a more powerful undead rising. That is the reason why there are powerful undead in ruins."

"If an abandoned golem is carrying out the last order of its master

and tidying the place up, that would be a godsend. One less thing to worry about. What is the plan after that?"

"—I think Hekkeran should have gone in my stead."

"Don't worry about it. The other leaders didn't go either right? Send the best person for the job, right?"

Arche sighed in response to the winking Hekkeran.

"—Anyways, once night falls, all the teams will move together. We will go in from the four sides and gather at the large mausoleum in the center."

"I see, we will be spotted easily if we do it in broad daylight."

"—That's true."

They had a clear view of the surrounding area and saw no signs of surveillance or travelers. It didn't seem to be a problem to invade it now, but they should prepare for the unexpected. Moving in the dark was safer.

Although the operation began at nightfall, they might be able to gain further information by continuing to observe the ruins. They had limited time to complete their job, but the time used here would be well spent, at least according to the brains of the operation.

It wouldn't have been a surprise if they had spent several days observing the site.

"Wouldn't it be safer to scout the place with 'invisibility'?"

"—We considered that, but there is a chance things might get hairy anyway, so we might as well do it together. Even in the worst case scenario, we will at least find out something."

There were numerous ways to detect invisibility, so it was not a

perfect spell. If the workers approached after using magic and were detected by the security of the ruins, the level of security of the opponent will rise even if they don't know who the intruders might be. If they screw it up, they might not be able to infiltrate the place for days.

To avoid that from happening, they came up with the plan to move in at the same time.

Hekkeran nodded in understanding. There were flaws, but the plan was still balanced between the risk taken and the chance of completing the mission.

"I hope they give us some time to rest."

"—Is that so. 'Darkness' and 'Screaming Whip' will take care of security. To play it safe, we will take turns standing guard. We will go in the order we arrived at the Earl's home, two hours each."

"Got it, so we are going last."

"—That's right. We will take the stage at the very end."

Arche turned her head and shrugged after saying that.

"Thank you for your hard work."

Roberdyck nodded at Arche.

"—How tiring. It took so long because that scumbag suggested invading via brute force. It took a lot of effort to convince him. He really doesn't know what coordination means."

"Ahh, that sword genius-san…"

"Calling him a shitty bastard would be enough."

In the face of Imina's murderous words, Hekkeran smiled wryly and

changed the topic.

“Well then, let’s go back to camp and wait for our turn.”

“Agreed. It probably won’t rain for the time being, but it would be too late to prepare if it does. Imina-san, you’re up next, don’t keep showing that scary face.”

“Okay, ah, how infuriating. I really feel like stabbing him. Let’s set up camp far away from them.”

“It is fine as long as it is around the assigned spot.”

To be honest, it wasn’t fine, but it would be worse if they were too close to each other and started quarrelling.

Turning their backs to the ruins, the four of them started walking.

“—But the more I think about it, the more baffling it is. I don’t understand why the Earl would give out such a request.”

As they turned back because of those words, they found Arche had stopped to stare at the ruins.

“I couldn’t find anything about the reason, or the period these ruins were built. It’s like they suddenly popped up. The statues resemble those from the period before the Demon Gods Uprising, but have a more eastern feel about them. And the cross shaped tombstones… I don’t understand it at all.”

After listening to Arche’s mumbling, Hekkeran suppressed his smile and excitement with great effort.

“Which means the chance of finding something just as interesting is high, correct?”

“That’s correct. There must be frightening things inside.”

“...There will probably be horrifying undead inside, everyone.”

“—Uwah~, how scary.”

“—Too fake, Hekkeran. That doesn’t sound like me at all. And imitating my voice is creepy.”

“Ah, sorry about that.”

“But—it will be interesting.”

“Yup. Why does this cemetery exist? Who is entombed here? It stimulates my curiosity and thirst for knowledge.”

“I agree. Discovering the unknown is exciting.”

“—And finally money. It would be great if there is plenty of it.”

Hekkeran was satisfied by the smiles of his companions. There were times they did dirty work for money, but that wasn’t something they could talk about happily. Doing adventurer-like jobs suited them better.

Arche might not join in their adventures after taking custody of her sisters. It would definitely take some time to find another member to replace Arche, and more time was needed to adjust their team work. It was necessary to choose jobs that had lower difficulty.

This might be the last and hardest job they would take as a team.

From now on… Like adventurers… it would be nice to explore the unknown by taking on requests to adventure …

Hekkeran looked towards the sky that extended everywhere.

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As night enveloped the world, the workers came out from their well hidden low tents. For secretive individuals like themselves, it was time to go to work.

The adventurers began preparing food.

After lighting the kindling, which was a white, solid material, coal was added into the flames. The light from the flames were concealed by the effect of ‘Darkness’. ‘Darkness’ concealed the brightness, but not the fire itself. In the darkness, the flame boiled water extracted from the Infinite Waterskin.

The boiling water was poured into wooden bowls. The travel rations placed inside lost their shape and became fragrant soup. After adding hard bread, this was the food that was served to all.

The rest was up to their personal preference.

Although the bowl only had yellow soup—which workers liked for its nutrition and storage life, some people added thin slices of meat, other condiments, or they drank it as it was.

Everyone stopped after having a bowl. Considering the job ahead, this amount was too little.

However, eating something too heavy would definitely affect the mission. Eating nothing would be dangerous as well. No one knew when they could eat again.

The emergency food supply was also limited, since bringing too much would affect their agility. There was a need to gauge it precisely.

After handing the empty bowls to the adventurers, the workers put on their backpacks.

As the adventurers watched on, the workers started moving together. The adventurers were in charge of the base camp’s security and would not be taking part in the infiltration of the ruins.

After climbing over the hill, they spread out around the ruins. They had already prepared countermeasures if they were discovered during this phase.

A lot of people wore full plate armour, so their movement would be slow and the noise would make covert operation impossible, but that had already been taken into account. For people who could use magic, it was possible to overcome such trivial matters.

First, they would use ‘Silence’, a spell that negated noise within a certain area. Both the sound of armour and footsteps would not be heard.

Next would be ‘Invisibility’, which rendered the target undetectable by normal vision.

As a precaution, an ambusher with the ‘Silence’, ‘Invisibility’ and even the ‘Hawk Eye’ spell cast on him was watching the surroundings from the sky. To quickly deal with problems, he was armed with special arrows that had numbing effects.

After these two preparation phases, the groups reached their destination.

Here was where it officially began.

They descended from the hill onto the ruins several meters below. After exploring the surface, they would meet up at the large mausoleum in the center. And they needed to do so within the effective time of ‘invisibility’.

To minimize the chance of unexpected things happening, there was a need to follow each other’s footsteps. However, it would be difficult to tell everyone’s position when it was dark and everyone was invisible.

However, there was already a way to handle this.

A strange stick 30cm in length suddenly appeared on the ground. It

floated in the air as though someone invisible was holding it up, and emitted a faint light after it was bent.

This special stick—a glow stick—was made in such a way that the special alchemical fluids inside would mix when it was bent and emit light. It was dropped because the effect of invisibility also included all the items the user was carrying. In order to be visible to others, it had to leave the user's possession.

After flickering for a moment, the stick that had accomplished its purpose was destroyed. The glowing alchemical fluid splashed onto the ground, and was gone without a trace after touching the earth.

In such a way, all the teams signaled that they were ready.

It was too far to see the other teams, but four ropes simultaneously dropped down from the surface of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The ropes had knots tied at fixed interval for easy scaling.

The end of the rope was connected to a piton knocked into the ground, with the other end swaying slightly.

If someone were able to see through invisibility magic, they would be able to spot people climbing down the ropes.

Even someone like Arche, who focused more on magic training and knowledge instead of agility, could accomplish that. Or rather, workers and adventurers needed to go through strength training to complete such tasks.

Thanks to their accumulated training and the effectiveness of the knots, none of the workers fell, and all landed safely in the cemetery.

The first objective of each team were the smaller crypts.

As the duration of invisibility expired, all the members could now be seen. The teams headed toward the crypt they had been assigned to.

Crouching down and keeping close to the tombstones, trees and statues, they ran in the dim cemetery. ‘Silence’ was still in effect so they didn’t make any noise. The warriors wearing full plate armour also did their best to hide themselves. Several shadows moved across the ground.

♦ ♦ ♦

When the leader of Heavy Masher, Greenham, got close to the crypt, his eyes widened slightly. It was even more extravagant than he had imagined.

Even though they referred to this as a small crypt, it was only small in comparison to the large mausoleum in the center. Up close, its size and majestic architecture could be clearly seen.

The white stone walls were smoothly polished. Although a lot of time must have passed since its construction, there was no sign of any damage from the wind and the rain.

Beyond a flight of three steps made of marble was a thick metal door. The door was polished so well that there were no rust at all. Even the black steel was shining.

It was clear how carefully they were maintaining the building.

—Which meant that it was confirmed that the cemetery was occupied.

While Greenham came to this conclusion, his thief comrade went in and slowly investigated, starting from the stairs.

Greenham received a signal to back away—necessary because of ‘Silence’—and retreated slowly. This was to avoid area-effect traps.

The thief searched patiently for traps. It couldn’t be helped even if he was feeling impatient.

Souls resided within the body of men, and when that body begins to rot, the soul would be summoned away by the will of the gods. That was why the dead had to be buried immediately, with underground burial as the norm, but it was slightly different for those with special status such as the nobles.

If the dead were buried immediately, they would need to dig the corpse up to confirm that the body was decomposing. To see evidence of the decomposition, the corpse would be set aside for a period of time before being buried. However, the corpse would not be placed in the nobles' home.

What they would use would be a crypt at the cemetery. After placing the bodies there for a period of time, the priest would judge if the body was rotting and the soul had been summoned by god before burying it.

The place where the corpses were laid to rest was the communal space of the crypt. This spacious area had several stone platforms where the bodies lay in state. The scene of several rotting corpses lying in a row was creepy, but that was natural from the common sense of this world.

Things were different for great nobles who had authority and wealth. Instead of the communal crypt, they would use a family crypt passed down from their ancestors. The room where those with authority were summoned by god and their final resting place—crypts like that were owned and passed down the family as symbols of power.

It was normal to find household appliances and treasures as well. This meant the crypts were a treasure vault for tomb raiders. And therefore, it was also a place built with dangerous traps to deter intruders.

That definitely held true for such an extravagant crypt. Greenham's thief teammate checked the place carefully.

After the thief completed some of the checks and went to the door, the sound suddenly came back.

The duration of ‘Silence’ was over. It was just the right time. The thief silently stepped in front of the door and searched carefully. Finally, he placed something like a stethoscope and listened.

After several seconds, the thief turned his head Greenham and his other teammates and shook his head.

Which meant ‘there is nothing’.

The thief himself thought it was strange and tilted his head.

It was a mystery why it wasn’t locked, but since the thief couldn’t detect anything else, it would be the vanguards’ turn next.

Greenham went to the front and the thief reached for the door. Behind them was a warrior with a shield.

Greenham pushed the door handle down and slowly opened the door. Maybe it was well oiled or perhaps the caretaker of this place did his job seriously, but the heavy door opened easily despite its appearance.

The warrior who was ready for action stood between Greenham and the door, raising his shield to defend against sudden attack or traps.

However, there wasn’t anything like an arrow being shot over. The iron door was completely open and a deep darkness appeared before the Heavy Mashers.

“「Continual Light」.”

The arcane magic caster summoned a magic light. The brightness of the magic light could be roughly adjusted. The crypt was illuminated. With another spell, the weapon of the warrior was shining too.

What the light was shining on, was a room that could be easily mistaken for the chambers of a noble.

In the center of the room was a stone coffin normally seen in a temple. It was 2.5m long and engraved with intrinsic carvings. Four alabaster statues carved into the shape of fully armored and armed warriors, with swords and shields over full plate armor, stood at each corner.

And so—

"—Hmm, does this emblem match anything in your memory?"

"Erm, I don't know."

Hanging on the wall was a banner with golden edges, bearing an emblem no one had seen before. The Kingdom might be a foreign nation, but the thief and magic caster had memorized the heraldry of many nobles and kings. Since they couldn't identify it, it was safe to assume it was foreign in nature.

"Could it be some nobles before the founding of the Kingdom?"

"You mean this is from more than two hundred years ago?"

Many countries had been destroyed by the demon gods two hundred years ago, which was why there were very few countries with more than two hundred years of history. The Kingdom, the Holy Kingdom, the Republic and the Empire were all founded within the past two hundred years.

"If that is true, why is it so well-preserved after such a long time? What is it made of?"

"It should be enchanted with preservation magic right? Maybe it was repaired by magic."

"By the way leader. You can stop that strange way of speaking now, can't you? We are the only ones here."

"Hmmm…" Greenham frowned, and then relaxed. "Ahh, that's so

tiring. All that thou and art stuff, how stupid."

"It must be hard on you. Like he said, it is fine if we are alone right?"

"Nah, I can't do that, that stiff way of speaking makes me look like a capable worker. It's troublesome to change midway, ain't it? Don't you all know my policy while on the job?"

Greenham answered his comrade's wry smile with a wry smile of his own.

Greenham was originally the third son of a farmer working in the Kingdom.

Like the saying goes, if many people split the farm lands, after several generations, the land each person could inherit would gradually grow smaller. The farm produce each family could harvest would also decrease. That's why the eldest son would inherit the land, the second son could work as a helper, but the third son and the others would be nothing but trouble. It was normal for them to move to the city to seek a livelihood.

However, Greenham was blessed with a good body, and it worked out well in the end. But in the end he was just a farmer and the education he had received as the reserve of the reserve was as good as nothing. That went for reading, writing and etiquette.

It was true that workers focused on ability and the execution of the assigned task, not etiquette. However, it wasn't good for him as a leader.

He worked hard on it, but unlike the talent he had with his body, he wasn't gifted in such a way and it was barely passable. Greenham kept his position as leader because he was highly regarded in all other aspects. However, in order to not embarrass his comrades, Greenham started speaking in that strange manner.

"'This quirky way of speaking is normal as a way to advertise my team." That was what he wanted the clients to think.

Despite that, people would still look down on him. However, that kind of image would still be better than a dim-witted farmer.

“Alright, break time is over. We’re moving out, lads.”

Greenham announced and everyone started moving without complaint.

First was the thief who cautiously entered the crypt to search for traps.

The rest of the group placed a thick metal bar between the doors so it would not be closed completely even if there was a mechanism which shut the door. To avoid light from spilling out, the door was half closed. While the thief cautiously inspected the room, Greenham and the others did not let down their guard. The use of light couldn’t be helped. It was entirely possible that they might be spotted.

While Greenham and the rest of the team were crouching and watching the surroundings, the thief went to the area below the banner and observed it for a moment. After making up his mind, he reached for the banner, and pulled back nervously the moment he touched it.

“There is no problem here, everyone come in.”

The thief turned his head back towards Greenham and the others as he pointed at the banner.

“...This is really valuable, made from cloth-of-gold.”

“Haaahhh!? Cloth-of-gold? Leaving this here just like that, is there something wrong with their head?”

All of them gasped in surprise. Everyone gathered under the banner and took turns touching it. The cold material under their fingers was definitely metallic.

Considering how grand it looked, the appraisal of the thief should be correct. From this size, weight and artistic value, it must be worth a fortune.

“Our client won this one. Although our, or rather, the full payment for the four teams hasn't been collected yet, there are definitely loads of treasure here.”

“Do we take it with us right now?”

Greenham answered the thief’s query.

“This is too big. And heavy. Let’s take it later, any objections?”

“No. It will be difficult to move with this in tow. As for the result of the inspection, there are no traps or hidden doors.”

“...Well then, please.”

Greenham nodded at the mage— an arcane magic caster. His companion replied by casting a spell.

“‘Detect Magic’— I can’t detect any magical traps either. We can dismiss the possibility of anyone hiding with concealment magic.”

“...The inspection is almost done, let’s head for the main target.”

Their gaze fell on the stone coffin in the middle of the room.

The thief spent a lot of time investigating and concluded that there were no traps.

Greenham and the warrior nodded at each other and began the task of opening the stone coffin. It was rather big and should be very heavy, but it was lighter than they thought. They used too much strength and almost lost their balance.

The stone coffin’s cover opened, revealing numerous sparkling lights

from within.

Gold, silver and gems of various colours, in addition to numerous sparkling accessories. And more than a hundred gold coins scattered all over.

They had been expecting something good after seeing the banner, but Greenham still grinned from ear to ear at this sight. The thief who was observing carefully picked up one of the items inside— a gold necklace.

It was an impeccable piece of jewelry. It seemed to be a simple gold necklace at first glance, but on close inspection, the chains had fine engravings on it.

"...A conservative estimate would be one hundred gold coins. With the right buyer, one hundred fifty would be possible."

The reaction to the thief's appraisals were different. Some of them whistled while others smiled. One common point was the joy and flames of greed burning in their eyes.

"Just the half we can get will be a bonus of fifty gold. Ten gold each, that's a scary amount of additional payout."

"That is really… Maybe these ruins are a treasure trove."

"Incredible. This is so incredibly amazing."

"Really. It would be a pity to just leave the treasure here. Let's put it to good use."

As he spoke, the wizard picked out a ring with a large ruby on it and kissed the gemstone.

"That's huge—"

The priest stuck his hands in, picking up the coins and letting it slip

through his fingers.

The crisp sound of gold coins clinking against each other were heard.

“I have never seen such gold coins before. Which time period and country are they from?”

Using his knife to lightly nick the surface of the gold coin, the thief said with a sigh:

“This is pure gold. Just the weight is double the norm, the value would probably be higher, considering the aesthetic value.”

“This is really—Kukuku…”

Laughter leaked out from the group who couldn’t help smiling.

Just dividing the loot here would not be a small amount.

“All of you, thank your gods later. Let’s take what we can and head to the main objective. Our share will be taken if we are late.”

“—Ho!”

Greenham received a spirited reply, filled with excitement and fervour.

Part 4

The grand mausoleum was situated at the centre of the ruin. Giant statues of warriors that looked as if they would come alive at any moment surrounded the grand crypt like knights defending their king. Hekkeran hid himself at the feet of the warrior statue that was staring in the direction of one of the smaller crypts.

After a short while, Hekkeran noticed five men running from the smaller crypt. They moved fast yet still managed to conceal themselves Hekkeran watched paranoidly for anyone that might be spying on them or anything strange happening. Finally, after confirming the group coming this way was fine, Hekkeran sighed in relief.

He signalled by peeking out of the shadow of the giant statue and Greenham rushed over after noticing him.

“You sure are late Greenham.”

“Thank you for waiting for us this long.”

“We didn’t decide on the time to meet up so it’s fine. Instead, let’s change the location and then decide what to do next.”

Hekkeran crouched and lead the way cautiously.

A few steps later, Greenham asked.

“Just want to ask, did your team discover any treasure?”

Unable to hide his excitement and remembering how he had felt, his mouth curved into a smile and said:

“Of course, a motherload. Elder said the same thing.”

“You all as well, huh. Coming to this cemetery was the right move.”

“That’s true. I am grateful to the great men buried here.”

“Hmm. That might be so, but since we found so many treasures, should we consider the possibility that there might be nothing where the master of this tomb is buried??”

“Well, I bet there would be even more.”

“Hmm—how much are you betting?”

“Great. I will find more later and I can get a decent sum from you, too. This is the best. Ah, the problem is we would both be betting on the same thing.”

Both men didn’t make a sound as the corner of their mouth rose into a smile.

“That’s true. By the way, what is that?”

In front of Greenham, besides the feet of a giant statue, was something like a stone tablet.

“That?”

Hekkeran didn’t stop, while giving Greenham his answer. The words written on it were something the first three teams that arrived before him had never seen before. They held on to the faint hope that Greenham’s team might know about it.

“Something like a stone tablet, engraved with what might be words.”

“Engrave with what might be words? Why are you being so vague about this?”

“It is an unknown language. Not the national language of the Kingdom or the Empire, or even the ancient languages around the region. It might not be human language either. But I can read the number 2.0 here.”

“Numbers? Thinking about it with common sense, it should be the year this place was built. But the number is too small.”

“Arche thinks it might be a password for something in the ruins… Well, just keep it in mind.”

“Right, let’s do that.”

After passing through the giant statues and climbing up the long and narrow tilted platform formed by the stone coffin, what they saw was an open entrance.

“The stench of the dead.”

“Ahhh. It is, I smell that often from the thick fogs at Kattse plain.”

Greenham agreed with Hekkeran with a soft voice.

It wasn’t a strong, nauseating stench, but the smell of the undead accompanied by the cold found in the cemetery.

This might be a beautiful cemetery, but there were definitely undead here.

The group steeled themselves and saw a vast space within when they entered. Numerous stone platforms were placed to the left and right, on the other side were the stairs leading down. The door leading down was wide open and an uneasy atmosphere flowed out from within.

“This way.”

With Hekkeran leading the way, Greenham and the others went down the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs was a burial chamber with a door on the other side. Aside from that, no other doors could be seen.

It was narrower than the crypt upstairs, but there was plenty of space. Hekkeran’s team ‘Foresight’, Eruya’s ‘Tenmu’ and Parupatra’s team were all here.

“Well then, what should we do next? Our plan was to spread out and gather information. Any new ideas after having searched the crypts?”

After speaking, Hekkeran glanced at everyone who had gathered.

There didn't seem to be any more new ideas. Was it greed gleaming off them or merely a reflection of light? It wasn't clear, but everyone's eyes were lively. Everyone seemed to be filled with excitement and couldn't wait to go in the cemetery.

"A suggestion. My team will check for hidden doors and search outside."

That was their leader's words, but his members seemed unhappy about it.

It was because of the treasures they saw. They couldn't agree even if it was the opinion of their well experienced leader. They were probably imagining a mountain of treasure flying away before their eyes.

"What do you say? We did search the surface, but we weren't that thorough. There's a chance that one of the smaller crypts has a hidden passage inside, right? Isn't rest of the cemetery worth surveying?"

"Elder has a point. I heard that even the Sasasharu Ruins, which bards sing of all the time, have a safe passage leading directly to the centre of the ruin just steps away from the entrance."

"Ah, Greenham. We checked all the way up to this room, but didn't find any hidden passages."

"That is why I'm offering to do this. As compensation for my team taking this lesser job, how about giving me a cut of the loot you find on this floorl. Yup, how about ten percent from each team? And tomorrow, let my team be the first ones to search the floor below this one?"

"I have no objection to this proposal."

The first to speak was Greenham. Hekkeran agreed a moment later.

"Good, we are all agreed then! What about you Uzruth?"

“I’m not comfortable with it, but since it’s just ten percent, so be it.”

The elder simply smiled at his sarcastic voice. In the end, it was Eruya who made a bitter expression after his snide attitude failed to garner any response.

“Ah, Elder. Can I ask you for a favour since you’re going to pass that way. We found a banner made with gold thread in the crypt we searched, but it looked too cumbersome to lug around. Could we trouble you to take it back?”

“I agree with Hekkeran. It might be a hassle, but could you help us out?”

“In that case, take mine too.”

Eruya gestured with his chin to one of the elves, and she took out a large piece of cloth to place it on the ground, all the while staggering under its weight.

“Understood. Aside from these, is there anything else you want me to safekeep or carry back?”

There was no answer to Parupatra’s question.

“Very well! Like I proposed earlier, my team will search the top. Be careful. It’s fine if you leave something valuable for me.”

“Haha, we can leave a couple of monsters for you, but there won’t be a single coin left behind for you.”

After a round of laughter, Hekkeran asked the others: “Shall we go?”

Everyone agreed immediately. They took a step forward. With their eyes shining with greed and anticipation, they took their first step into the unknown ruins—the great underground tomb.

The door opened and there was only one path leading deeper in. As

they expected, it was kept clean and tidy.

Things like rust and moss weren't found on the stone passage, there were some indents on the wall where human shaped figures, wrapped in burial clothing, had been placed. There wasn't the unique scent of corpse here. Instead, there was a cold air and smell of the undead.

There were flickering bluish white lights on the ceiling a fixed distance from each other. However, since the distance between them was rather large, there was some darkness along the way. The light allowed them to move freely, but was just dim enough that they might miss something. It would feel dangerous if they didn't have an alternate source of lighting.

"—Rob. Any undead reaction from that corpse?"

"No, nothing."

Arche thanked Rob and walked towards the corpse in the body bag, cutting open with her knife. After seeing her actions, the other team also sent out one or two members to investigate the corpse inside the body bag.

"...From this height and built, the possibility of this being human is high. A full grown man."

"It is not wearing clothes, so it is hard to tell what time period this ruins is from."

"But this ruins is filled with mysteries. The architecture, burial method and time period are all unknown. Maybe it is something from six hundred years ago."

"—If that is true, this will be a historical find."

For people doing research, this might be a topic worth discussing, but they were here to do a job.

After receiving cold stares from Hekkeran and Greenham, they hastily announced the investigation result “The time period and background of the ruins are still a mystery.”

“Understood. Shall we move on? Personally, I want to kill some monsters.”

Agreeing with the dissatisfied Eruya, the group moved ahead but stopped shortly.

Their stances were ready to draw their weapon.

Sounds of bones creaking ahead could be heard.

Due to the illumination from the ceiling, they could see the figures of the undead ahead.

After closing the distance and identifying the opponents, the workers was shaken as if they were seeing something incredible and discussed softly.

“Isn’t that too…”

“Hey, are you for real…”

“Eh? Are there only skeletons?”

The moment someone finally blurt out the name of the monster, the group couldn’t endure it anymore and burst out into laughter.

“Hey hey hey!! Isn’t sending skeletons a gone case? We have many people here alright?”

The appearance of skeletal monsters look roughly the same, so it was hard to tell what type they were.

However, it was easy to judge that these were normal skeletons from the air they gave off.

“Even if these are scouts, they should send out stronger monsters— I got it! There are either no monsters controlling this cemetery, or they are too incompetent to tell how strong we are. Or they are morons who didn’t even notice they have been infiltrated!

They couldn’t stop laughing.

“Eh, it is impossible for skeletons. Or maybe all the treasures in this ruin are placed in the crypt on the surface?”

“That would be terrible.”

For workers who were on par with mithril adventurers, skeletons were too weak. And the workers even outnumbered them.

In front of the six skeletons, they looked at each other thinking about who should go.

“I don’t want to.”

Eruya declared. It was easy to understand how he felt.

“Then I shall go.”

Greenham said and walked to the front.

The weak mind of the skeleton seemed to be thinking about something. They were probably thinking about overwhelming the lone warrior. Or maybe they were considering something else.

The skeletons attacked together and—

They were easily shattered by the swinging shield and axe.

It only took a few seconds. Maybe less.

Smashing the six skeletons and stepping on their remains, Greenham sighed as if he was tired. It wasn’t fatigue from the battle, but the fact

that the first opponent in this great ruin was the too weak, the lowest tier undead skeleton.

“How brittle, just skeletons after all. That may be so, but it would be foolish to get careless. Keep the possibility that powerful undead might pop up in mind and advance with great caution!”

They straightened their faces after hearing Greenham’s words and moved on— towards the depths of the ruins. Their hearts were filled with the anticipation of the treasures lying ahead.

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“Yare yare, so they left huh.”

“They did. They might be workers, but we are working on the same team now, so we are colleagues for this job. It will be great if they return safely… Momon-san, what do you think?”

“—All of them will die.”

Ainz replied with a deep voice, stunning the leader of the adventurer team.

Oh no, I said my thoughts out loud—

“Eh, oh, I mean being mentally prepared for that possibility. These are unknown ruins we are talking about. There is no way of telling what dangers they will run into. Holding on to high hopes will only result in great disappointment.”

“I see, so it’s like that… Sorry for making you worry.”

… I was winging it, and he agreed with me? Well, that works great for me.

The team leader lowered his head like this because he blindly thought the words of the adamantite-ranked man were correct.

Ainz' effort— his response filled with good intentions and friendly attitude during the journey to Nazarick paid off.

"So as we planned, I will take a break first."

Ainz headed towards his — which was of course shared with Nabel — tent. As it was a certain distance away, some people assumed it was to keep others from hearing moans. Or rather, that was what they heard from the leader just now.

Compared to the workers, he felt more camaraderie with Momon who was also an adventurer, and shared the information he got from the workers freely.

Ainz and Nabel closed the entrance of the tent after going in. They peeked out just in case and no one seemed to be watching them. In fact, there were people who intentionally made a show of not caring.

"...Even though they said this is a love nest, not denying it outright was probably the right move. They don't suspect anything even though our tents are further away, they don't pay attention to this place and they don't get close."

There were downsides too, but the benefits outweighed the cons.

Ainz removed his helmet and revealed his skeletal face.

"Well then, Nabe… No, Narberal. I will return to Nazarick and send Pandora's Actor to replace me as planned. If something happens in the meantime, resolve it by yourself."

"By your command, Ainz-sama."

"Erm. Contact me if there is anything."

Ainz dispelled the magic that created his armor and sword, and the weight of the helmet disappeared in his hands. The sense of liberty from taking off the armour made Ainz utter “ah” in relief, although it wasn’t that hard on him. It was the same reason why he was rotating his shoulders that weren’t stiff at all. These actions were remnants of his time as a human.

“...Yare yare.”

The remnants of human emotions were troublesome sometimes.

If he could handle every situation calmly, the circumstances might be different now. However, if he lost all remnants of his human emotions, he wouldn’t love the Great Tomb of Nazarick as much as he did right now. The longing the human Suzuki Satoru had for his friends will probably disappear as well.

While Ainz was smiling wryly, he cast his magic. Thoughts about his remnants of humanity was gone from the back of his mind. Ainz wasn’t a talented person who could focus on two or three things at a time. He needed to drop everything aside from what he was considering.

His spell was ‘Greater Teleportation’.

Since he was wearing a ring, Ainz made it through the barrier of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, all the way to the entrance of the Throne Room.

“Welcome back, Ainz-sama.”

Moments later, a beautiful female voice welcomed his return.

“I am back, Albedo.”

The lady who bowed deeply raised her head, a blossoming smile appeared on her beautiful face. She looked straight at Ainz—as if she couldn’t see anything else.

Ughh...

Seeing the golden pupils filled with beams of love, he couldn't help feeling goosebumps all over. But he couldn't adopt an attitude unbefitting that of Ainz Ooal Gown, the ruler of the Grand Tomb of Nazarick.

Ainz suppressed the feeling that weakened during the short moment of silence, and coughed fakely.

"Just as planned, the invaders are here. No, maybe they are already inside. How are the preparations to welcome them?"

"The preparations are done. The guests will definitely be delighted."

"I see… Albedo. I look forward to seeing their elation."

He walked to the heart of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the Throne Room. Albedo followed him one step behind.

Albedo had only one order regarding the invaders this time. That was to conduct a practical test for the performance of her defense system.

Where to place the POPs in Nazarick and the combination of monsters were all done by his past guild mates, and must be done really well. But given the current situation, it was hard to say that a better setup didn't exist.

Thus it was necessary to inspect the defense system. And they could do that now.

"...The invaders are fragile, so of course we can't test everything. But let us pray we can learn something from this."

"I understand. I promise that I will not let you down, Ainz-sama."

"Good. As you already know, avoid using traps that cost money like spraying poisonous gas or sudden floods of undead, try to use POPs

and traps with serfs. Any problems?"

In response to Albedo's smile, Ainz nodded.

"Very well, in the mean time, let us enjoy ourselves. What are the other Floor Guardians doing?"

"Yes. The moment Ainz-sama returned, I have instructed them to gather. Will it be fine to grant them entry according to the order they arrive?"

"Granted. The more people there are, the merrier."

Before the throne on which Ainz was sitting down were numerous things that looked like TV screens floating in the air. Each one of them displayed a different part of Nazarick. Albedo who was controlling it to show Ainz what he wanted to see.

Next would be Albedo displaying her control over the defense net. Ainz wasn't sure what the changes between now and before were though.

… To make full use of this training, I have to learn something from the displayed images. If there is a sharing session after this, it will be bad.

Ainz was the absolute ruler of the Grand Tomb of Nazarick. How could such a man not understand anything about the defense system compared to his subordinate?

"Just in case, I have to ask. There are no chances of triggering 'Ariadne', correct?"

Ainz opened his console and controlled the cursor, checking for problems as he asked.

"I don't think there is a chance of that happening. However, I want to confirm whether Ariadne will be triggered if the invaders are locked up?"

Ainz remembered the Yggdrasil Q&A he read in the past, no, the update-log explanations by the developers.

“There shouldn’t be… that should be so… I think that’s how it was.”

Even though that was the case in Yggdrasil,there was no guarantee that this rule still applied in this world. Even the existence of Ariadne itself was not confirmed.

“What would happen if we were to manipulate the humans into doing so themselves?”

“There might be a chance it won’t activate, but considering the losses if it does I was too scared and never tested it.”

Ariadne system.

A system that checks the validity of a created base.

There was a simple way of creating an invincible fortress: By sealing the entrance, no one would be able to get in. Just burying the entire Grand Tomb of Nazarick underground would be enough. But as a game, this was not allowed.

In order to stop one from making such a base, the Ariadne surveillance system existed.

There must be a path that lead from the entrance to the heart of the base. Other things Ariadne inspected were the distance one could travel inside, how many doors there were and various other rules on base construction that were set in detail.

Dungeons that violated the rules would be flagged by the Yggdrasil system and fined. The Guild funds would be deducted gradually at a visible rate.

For Nazarick, such problems were solved by the 5th and 6th levels— They had to pay a lot to widen the dungeon to maintain it.

Ainz controlled one of the monitor which displayed the figures of the workers.

“Tch! Well then, it is finally time for them to show up. They made me wait really long.”

Feelings of unhappiness hit Ainz when he saw the images of the stronghold he made with his comrade being sullied by the dirty feet of the invaders. Although his emotions would be suppressed if it exceed a certain threshold, but it couldn’t completely keep his burning anxiety down.

“Albedo. Don’t allow any of them to escape.”

“Of course. Please enjoy watching the fate of the thieves intruding into the residence of the Supreme Beings. Also… which guinea pig should we choose for the experiment?”

“Ah, right. I sparred with this old man. I sparred with this man on the way too. This team is not suitable for training. Let’s dispose of these fellows first.”

Ainz pointed with his finger at a monitor Albedo could see.

Chapter 3 - The Large Tomb

3章 大墳墓

Part 1

The worker team led by Parupatra, “Green Leaf”, departed from those caught up in expectations and excitement and looked at the surroundings from the top of the main tomb’s entrance stairway.

As if everything in the graveyard had been covered by winter snow, there was nothing alive and everything seemed dead. There was only silence and starlight. The team asked him when they finished climbing the steps.

“Elder, don’t you think it was a wasted opportunity? We could have left searching the surface to other teams.”

“That’s true. No matter the team… except for that bastard’s, there shouldn’t be much difference in abilities. Anything we can do, “Heavy Masher” or “Foresight” can probably do as well.”

“Then…”

Parupatra interrupted his comrade and continued.

“But didn’t we get the right to be the first searchers tomorrow? We aren’t going to be missing out on too much. Plus, by tomorrow, the survey of the inside should be finished. The last team to go in would miss out on all the loot, and in the worst case scenario, get stuck in the base camp with guard duty.”

“Ah-ha…”

“It’s too risky to be the first ones to go into an unknown location. They are going to be our little canaries. I hope they return unharmed.”

Parupatra turned around with cold eyes. His gaze was fixed on the place where the workers who entered the tomb had been standing. His sublime disdainful expression was not befitting the usual jolly

and fluffy man nicknamed the “elder”. Those who didn’t know much about him would be surprised, but his comrades knew.

The old man named Parupatra was a very cautious man. He was the kind of man who would check a bridge twice before crossing. That was how he had managed to survive as an adventurer for such a long time, and he had even vanquished a dragon once. Conversely, he had also missed out on many opportunities due to his cautious nature. However, because he had never lost a single comrade so far, all his teammates trusted his decisions.

Although life was the most precious treasure of them all, there was still some lingering regret that they might be missing out on the loot.

“This is a chance to find some really amazing items. Isn’t that worth the risk?”

“You’re not wrong, but take a look at this cemetery. Don’t you think this is too clean? If something is cleaning this place, a monster might pop out to say hello. It’d be best to let the other teams find out what kind of monsters there are. Personally, I don’t really like requests like these. There’s too many unknowns.”

A teammate carefully responded to Parupatra’s complaint.

“But you took it anyway.”

“That’s because the other teams took it as well. In the worst case scenario, we’ll leave them behind as bait while we run away.”

The team stepped off the stairs.

“Is that why you suggested searching the surface? So we can run away in case we hear their screams?”

“That too. But I think of this as a gamble… Like you said, we might miss out on the loot. If we had more information, it might be safer, but we don’t know if the benefits will outweigh the risks. If you are right, I apologize.”

“Don’t worry about it, elder. We all trust you. After all, in most cases, you were right.”

“Plus, even if we miss out today, we can find other jobs to make money. You said it yourself, as long as you’re alive, opportunities to make money will always be there. So there’s no need to dive in recklessly.”

“How nostalgic. That was from when we were still young.”

“Haha, you sure you aren’t still young?”

“Don’t joke like that, elder. You shouldn’t be the one saying that.”

The team headed to one of the small crypts smiled bitterly.

“But I should have discussed this with you guys before making a decision. I’m sorry that I went ahead and decided by myself.”

“Well, you couldn’t help it in that situation. Plus, elder is our chosen leader. If our trusted leader decided so, we’ll follow.”

“…You guys don’t look too happy though. Why is everyone smiling so bitterly? Well, either way. Let’s finish the survey quick and if we have some time left over, let’s ask Momon for another spar. This is an excellent opportunity for you guys, too. So how about it?”

“I vividly remember the two of you sparring. Indeed, it was a duel befitting of an adamantite-ranked adventurer.”

“…Even amongst the adamantite ranked adventurers, there are many kinds of people. Right now, “Eight Ripples” in the Empire is not truly an adamantite ranked party. Someone like Momon would be a proper adamantite ranked adventurer. A man who achieved something I could never do.”

“Elder…”

“Hahaha, don’t worry too much about it. If I was still in my prime, I would have been jealous, but now I’m just an old man. I’m not particularly shocked. I’ve seen a few adamantite ranked adventurers in my time, but Momon is a special one even amongst them. I feel that he’s the real deal.”

“Really?”

“Of course. So you guys should ask him to check out your swordsmanship. If you choose to keep adventuring after I die, that kind of experience will prove invaluable in future.”

“I can’t imagine elder dying. Maybe there’ll be a nice retirement.”

“Right. Elder will probably live long like Paradyne.”

“Hahaha, no, that’s too much for me. He’s on a completely different level.”

“What a wonderful team.”

A woman’s voice came out of nowhere. The only women that were with them were the two from Hekkeran’s ‘Foresight’ and the three elven slaves from Eruya’s ‘Tenmu’. But the voice sounded different from any of theirs.

Everyone turned around with weapons ready.

Several women stood at the top of the mausoleum stairs they had just descended. There were five of them. They were unbelievably beautiful, but that was also what made it so strange.

Everyone wore maid’s clothing, but their clothing was unlike any they had seen before. Those clothes had a metallic shine about them, just like armour.

“Who… are you? I’ve never seen you before… Hmm, is there a secret tunnel just like I expected?”

“Women? They are just as good-looking as the beauty of ‘Darkness’… They don’t look like ordinary people.”

“They don’t seem like an enemy… But, not likely to be hired by same people who hired us…”

“What should we do, elder?”

His comrades asked Parupatra while keeping their eyes on the women. Negotiating with them would be the best option, but there was no way it could end that well.

“We have the same numbers… It could be even?”

The opponents’ strength must be equal or just a little above theirs. The reason why they hadn’t attacked when all the workers were gathered must have been because they were not strong enough to take on everybody at once or because they thought it might have been a trap. The reason they finally showed their face must be because they were confident they could win against Parupatra’s group.

Parupatra sweated less and less as he got older but in this moment, his hand that was holding the spear was wet.

“Even so, to put a maid in a cemetery… Someone has questionable taste.”

In an instance, the comrade who had been joking just now shivered, his face pale and his brow full of sweat.

Parupatra also felt a sudden chill come over him, but the reason he had goosebumps all over was not just because of the temperature.

The coldness in the eyes of the maids who were aligned on top of the stair was clearly visible under the moonlight. It was almost as if their eyes were shining

“kILl TheM.”

“…..They need to die.”

“They don’t deserve a quick death. They need to suffer unimaginable pain before dying.”

A murderous aura whirled around the maids. The whirlpool of emotion was so strong, it made one wonder if the world might be collapsing around them.

“Now, now.”

The maid who looked to be the one in charge clapped lightly.

“We were ordered to let none return alive, so killing them is a given. But it’s nice to see everyone being so enthusiastic about it.”

Clack. Metallic sounds resounded down the stairs, which seemed to be made of marble. It was the maids’ high-heels, which resembled greaves.

Parupatra’s comrades backed off as if they had been pushed back. Considering their opponents carried no weapons, they were most likely magic casters. On top of that, the opponent held the advantage of the high ground. They could not afford to keep standing around in wide and open areas without any cover.

For Parupatra and his team, closing the distance was advantageous. For the maids, it was the opposite. But why were those maids coming down the stairs? Were they planning to use ‘Flight’ if the situation got dangerous for them?

Watching the maids, who appeared emotionless as if they were wearing masks as they regally descended the stairs, Parupatra’s team gathered behind the warrior’s shield and discussed the next step.

Clack. Making an even louder noise, the maids stopped about halfway

down the stairs.

“Now, I’ll introduce myself first. I am the Pleiades’ sub-leader, Yuri Alpha. I think this will be a short meeting, but please take care of me. If we decided to deal with you ourselves, it would be over pretty fast, but due to certain circumstances, we can’t deal with you personally. How unfortunate.”

A lovely voice rolled out like a bell ringing in the wind. The unbelievably beautiful maids’ smiles were overflowing with an attractiveness that could make any man fall in love in an instant.

Parupatra was a former adventurer and had seen many things in his career as a worker. Amongst them were beings that possessed beauty beyond a human being, such as elves. Even so, he had never seen such beautiful women before. It was enough to make one’s jaw drop.

Their contemptuous tone and the sense of superiority which flowed through their words could only be the arrogance of the incredibly powerful people that hid underneath those pretty faces. It was an attitude that did not sit well with men who had braved countless dangers and were confident in their skills. It almost made them want to scold the maids.

But considering the circumstances, it was likely that the maids were stronger and nobody was keen on fighting them. Plus, one of their comrades had been stunned with killing intent and had yet to snap out of his fear.

Perhaps the best option was to retreat to the adventurers—especially Momon—and bring them in as reinforcements.

“Then I shall introduce your opponents.”

Yuri clapped her hands. As if responding to the clapping noise, which travelled surprisingly far, the cemetery shook.

“Come out, Nazarick Old Guarders.”

“What?”

The ground had split behind them and several skeletons showed up.

Is this a pincer attack?! Wha…

Looking up the stairs, the maids were hostile, but didn’t seem to want to fight in person. They appeared to be spectators. He couldn’t ignore them, but they didn’t seem to want to attack, just as they had announced.

Parupatra concluded that the true enemies were the skeletons at the rear and turned around to face them.

Skeletons by themselves weren’t really a difficult opponent. Even if hundreds of skeletons attacked Parupatra’s team, they would be able to clean them up easily. Compared to that, the eight skeletons that had sprouted from the ground were nothing.

But there was one problem.

Parupatra’s comrades gulped and unconsciously took a step back.

The atmosphere around them was different from regular skeletons. Even their equipment was different. They wore magnificent breastplates befitting of some country’s royal guard, held kite shields with an emblem in one hand and various kinds of weapons in the other. On their backs were composite long bows, and all their equipment had a magical glow to them.

There was no way skeletons armed with magical items would simply be regular skeletons.

“Just what is that?”

“Not even you know, elder? I’m not sure… but maybe it’s a sub-species of the ‘Skeleton Warrior’.”

“Sub-species? They don’t quite look like ‘Red Skeleton Warrior’, either…”

A never seen before and unknown opponent would always evoke fear. Especially if they were armed with magic weapons with special effects.

“—Considering how many of you there are, I believe this will be a sufficient number. Please put some effort into it, and show us how far you can run.”

“It’s an honour to face undead like these. But…”

Parupatra thought objectively.

It would be difficult to have too many undead armed with so many magic equipment. Their plan was probably to send out the strongest from the start. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have waited for everyone to come inside and split up.

“—This is the tomb’s ultimate strength, right? Do you really think you can stop us just with this?”

When Parupatra looked up, Yuri looked around as if she had been taken aback.

Bullseye. They had been setting up this trap ever since they started talking to us.

The smartest way to use their ultimate strength was to divide and conquer. Considering the chances they might not run into the enemy, the best strategy was to wait by the entrance, where everybody had to pass through when they were physically and mentally exhausted from searching the tomb.

The opponent’s plan was obvious as well. She probably said “let’s see how far you can run” to encourage them to start running away, so that she could strike from behind, which would be an advantageous position for her. The enemy would need to fight several more times

even after this, so they would want to conserve their strength as much as possible. Then there was only one thing to do.

“If we take down all the skeletons here and break through, it’s all over. Am I wrong?”

For the sake of the teams that would come behind them, they needed to destroy the Nazarick Old Guarders. They might be rivals, but comrades on a mission were still comrades. Furthermore, if the other side had predicted that they would flee, staying and fighting would have the least chance of falling into a trap. If their opponents were too strong, they still had the option of calling over Momon as a last resort.

“To think we would become the canaries instead… How should I say, it gives me a headache. But do you guys think that’s all of them?”

“It’s hard to imagine any more undead armed with that kind of equipment lying around.”

“This is the place any intruder must go through. Tactically, it makes sense to position the strongest force here. They know more about this place than us, and I doubt they would make the mistake of splitting up too much of their force.”

“…No, there’s bound to be some more inside the grave itself. But what’s there would probably be lower class undead.”

“Elder… let’s run. They’re dangerous. Really, really dangerous.”

“Our escape route was closed the moment they pincer attacked us. Even if we fly, we’ll probably get shot down with arrows. We need to make our stand here! There is no other way than defeating them head on!”

Amidst Parupatra’s shouts, a voice, part surprised and part patronizing, came from above.

“Well, I guess there is that way of breaking through. We’ll cheer for

you, so please start.”

As the words faded, the Nazarick Old Guarders began advancing.

Yuri and company had troubled faces as they “cheered them on”. They were unable to hide their surprise at the unexpected way the situation unfolded. They had not anticipated this at all.

“Hey, are they for real?”

“...Unexpected.”

“Cocytus-sama was surprised as well.”

“IF tHiNGs gO On liKE This… iT wON’t pRocEEd aS pLanNeD.”

A hammer swung through the air while Yuri and her companions looked on.

“Looks like he’s not gonna make it. He’s gonna die!”

The moment Lupusregina spoke, a man received a strike to the chest and fell.

The sound of metal being crushed and the sound of something heavy falling could be heard clearly even amidst a fierce battle.

The first casualty was the human warrior. The Nazarick Old Guarder that wielded a hammer imbued with ‘Lightning’ did not even celebrate his kill and simply moved in search for the next target.

“Cleric-san~ If you heal him fast enough, he won’t die.”

CZ shook her head at Yuri who sounded a little worried.

“...No point. Instant death. Also, the formation collapsed because of him.”

The two Nazarick Old Guarders which the warrior had been holding back advanced, with one heading towards the cleric and the other marching towards the rear of the formation. The cleric had been fighting against two from the start, and now he had to fight one more. He no longer had the room to use his magic. The only thing he could do was to try to dodge the attacks coming from three directions.

Even Parupatra, who was doing rather well for himself, was fighting against three opponents and could not help the others.

“The rogue just doesn’t have the firepower. Don’t they have some kind of trump card in their back pocket?”

Now the rogue who had to fight while defending the arcane magic caster had to take on one more opponent and he had already been facing two. A rogue’s light weaponry was unable to deal a decisive blow against a Nazarick Old Guarder— an opponent who was clad in heavy armor and an undead, who had no particular weak points. He tried to dodge with his nimble body, but against the tireless undead, resistance was futile.

“He’s looking over here with such a sad expression~”

“Should we wave to him?”

“tHAT mUch SHoulD be fIne.”

“If it’s okay~!”

Lupusregina waved her hands at Parupatra with an enthusiastic smile.

“...Direct hit.”

“It’s because Lupu distracted him.”

“Fuee~ Is it my fault, then?”

“…Yes. Your fault. But cheering is good. … Go team.”

“Yes. I hope they fight just as enthusiastically.”

Every maid nodded at Yuri’s words.

In the battle with Parupatra’s worker team, the Nazarick Old Guarders had completely dominated the fight from the beginning. Yuri and the maids almost felt sympathy for the workers while spectating a game that could only be described as a one-sided massacre.

Before the battle started, they had snickered at the useless bravado from the workers, but watching this boring fight, they could not suppress their yawns and started cheering for Parupatra’s team.

“If it’s this one-sided, I really don’t know what to say.”

“…No hidden card?”

“Weren’t they trying to use summoning magic just before?”

“The 3rd tier one?”

“Isn’t that too weak to be considered the trump card? But trying to make a wall with summoned monsters was a good idea”

“I agree! If they weren’t constantly getting attacked, they might have had time to strategize and rebuild the formation～.”

“BUt tRYiNG to UsE fliGhT, NoT a gOOd plan aS wRINkley Old MaN sAiD.”

“Not sure if he was trying to escape or just planning to cast magic from the air…”

“…Priority target. No cover at all.”

The arcane magic caster had already taken a critical injury and was collapsed on his side. If someone was free, they would have used either healing magic or a potion to bring the magic caster back into the formation, but everybody was too occupied. As a result, the only thing the rogue could do was protect him from being dealt the finishing blow.

“But why did they think there would be only that many Nazarick Old Guarders?”

It was a mystery.

Did they think of everything in a way that was convenient for them? It wasn’t because they were stupid. It might have been some human self-preservation method to gather courage and prevent themselves from falling into despair.

“It looks hopeless.”

“Seems so. It looks like it will end soon.”

“OthER sTratEgieS liKE deFeNDinG unTiL tHe otHEr tHieveS REturNeD mIGHt HavE beEN gOOd, toO.”

Everyone looked at Entoma with a cold expression.

“Why’d ya figure they can return?”

“...Brought it on themselves.”

“It would be too much for them to try to leave the Great Tomb of Nazarick.”

A pain-filled voice and something collapsing echoed out. The combat maids looked towards the source and spoke in voice filled with disappointment.

“aH tHe roGUe feLL As wElL.”

“Seems like it’s gonna to be over soon~.”

“We should have let them beg for their lives at the stairs…”

“But they were really confident. I thought they had something up their sleeves.”

It wasn’t sure if the rogue had sprayed it, but the pungent smell of fresh blood wafted all the way to where maids were standing.

“SmELls deLiCioUs…”

“Leave it be.”

Yuri stopped her.

The order from the master was to retrieve the bodies of everyone incapacitated, dead or alive. They could not do something as rude as presenting the body after insects had gone through them.

“FreSH MEat…”

“I’ll ask Ainz-sama for it later, so be patient for now.”

“But won’t we be in trouble now? Originally this was to test how effectively they could take out the ones trying to run away.”

“Looks like it! That’s why lots of strong undead are hiding by the wall.”

“SEeMs CoCYtUs-sAma cALcuLaTEd hE woULD cAtCh tHEm eaSILy.”

“...To attack head on. Unexpected.”

“It’s what happens when you don’t analyze your opponent's strength properly. As for the ones still alive, let’s heal them up and send them off to the interrogation room. For the dead ones… let’s report to Ainz-sama.”

Thus, Parupatra and his team disappeared from the world that night.

Part 2

“Start attacking again!”

Greenham’s shout echoed through the crypt filled with the stench of mould and death.

The room was about twenty meters wide and five meters tall. Amidst the room filled with light made by a magic caster and torches dropped on the ground, were the silhouettes of humans.

Along with Greenham, “Heavy Masher” was cornered. The interior was filled with lesser undead such as zombies and skeletons.

Their numbers were stupendous.

Greenham and a warrior holding a shield held back the tide of death from spilling onto the rear of the formation.

A zombie swung its arm at Greenham’s full plate armour. Even if it was an undead that was stronger than the average human being, it still couldn’t dent the steel armour. The rotten hand exploded and foul-smelling splotches of flesh clung to the armour.

The skeletons were the same. With only rusted weapons, they couldn’t get past the full plate armour imbued with magic. Perhaps one might get lucky and pierce the plate, but that was why it was imbued with magic.

Greenham swung his axe horizontally and took one down, but more undead rushed to fill the gap. The horde closed the distance as if to trample them with numbers.

“Damn it! There’s too many of them!”

The warrior holding a shield beside Greenham shouted with a laboured voice. Thanks to his large shield which covered his entire body, he was not injured, but the shield was covered with all kinds of vile fluids. He was smashing skeletons’ skulls with his mace, but he was slowly being pushed back.

“Where did they all come from?”

The warrior’s curiosity was natural.

Greenham’s team had searched several rooms after splitting off from the other teams at the crossroads. Unfortunately, there wasn’t as much treasure as the mausoleum, but after finding a sizeable chunk of valuables lying around, they slowly searched further. When they entered this room to have a look, the door suddenly opened and the undead started to pour in.

A zombie or a skeleton by itself wasn’t a difficult opponent, but their numbers were the real problem. Even if they fell or got trampled, they wouldn’t die, but the undead would reach the rear flank. Of course, the rear flank wouldn’t be taken out that easily either, but against this many, it was difficult to say.

With a little bit of bad luck, the front would collapse immediately. Greenham thought this, and decided to use the force he had been conserving.

“We’ll finish this in an instant. I leave it to you.”

The rear guard, which had only been slinging stones so far, started to move.

For Greenham’s “Heavy Masher”, undead like these were not really a threat. But because they weren’t a real threat, he tried to conserve their strength by keeping the rearguard in reserve. If the rear guard attacked as well, the undead wouldn’t be a problem.

“My lord, the god of earth! Please repel the evil ones!”

The cleric holding a holy symbol shouted while exuding divine power. The air filled with negative aura was cleared away and filled with freshness as if a cool breeze had just passed by. A wave of divine power, stronger than usual, swept out from the cleric.

As soon as the ability activated, the undead around the cleric turned to ashes.

Exorcising the undead usually just made them flee, but if there was an absolute difference in strength, it obliterated the undead instead. However, it was extremely difficult to obliterate large numbers of undead because it required a matching amount of strength.

As a result, over twenty undead were extinguished.

“Fly! 「Fireball」!”

A ‘Fireball’ flew from the arcane magic caster and exploded amidst the undead horde. A pillar of flame sprouted for a moment and burned away the undead’s false life within the effect radius.

“Not over yet! 「Fireball」!”

“My lord, the god of earth. Please repel the evil ones!”

The area of effect attacks struck again and the number of undead fell drastically.

“Let’s go!”

“Alright!”

The warrior abandoned his shield, grabbed two maces and jumped into the undead horde along with Greenham. It would have been easy to leave everything to the magic casters, but the reason Greenham rushed in was so that they would conserve as much mana as possible.

Especially for the cleric, who could only repel the undead a certain number of times per day. Because it was a job that was especially potent against undead, he would be their hidden card while they were in the tomb.

Greenham swung his axe at the group of zombies. Rather than blood, thick liquid came out from the cut,—it would have spurted if they had hearts—oozing weakly. From the cuts came a disgusting stench, but it was nothing they couldn't handle.

Rather, their noses were already numb.

Along with the warriors, they attacked, attacked and attacked. They did not think of defense even for a moment. It was the kind of a charge they could do thanks to their sturdy armour supported by magic, not to mention that the undead were weak.

At times, an undead managed to strike Greenham's head, but the armour absorbed all the shock and there was no strain on his neck. Even when he was struck on his chest or stomach, he barely felt it.

Their opponents were lesser undead. They were only a challenge because of their numbers, but since they had cleared out so many of the undead, they found a bit of breathing room once more. The warrior shouted while still swinging his weapons.

"Until now, we only fought the weakest ones, but considering their numbers, this tomb must have a lot of them!"

"Yea, also it wouldn't be strange if stronger undead have spawned and are still crawling around somewhere! But I don't know why they haven't come out!"

The person who replied was the cleric who picked up the warrior's shield while keeping an eye on the situation.

"…Perhaps all these undead were summoned. Maybe through some summoning magic or an item."

Because these undead corpses disintegrated after a certain amount of time, there weren't enough to fill the entire room with the bodies. These undead corpses also disappeared in a fashion similar to summoned monsters. That's why the magic caster interjected.

"Some kind of mechanism that mass summons lesser undead? … I don't want to think about that. Don't make me imagine this tomb packed tight with zombies everywhere."

Greenham replied and looked around the room while blowing away a skeleton's head as if he was trimming a tree. The number of undead remaining could be counted with two hands, and the wide open doors showed no signs of reinforcements for the undead. The fight would be over soon.

In that moment, he felt a chilling sensation rising from the bottom of his feet.

His sense of danger told him to evacuate, but it would be too late in this situation. Even so—

"Alert! Everyone get out of the room—"

The rogue shouted as if he had the same feeling.

But it was too late. The hard floor suddenly vanished. A floating sensation enveloped their bodies and a few heartbeats later their disoriented bodies hit the ground.

Greenham heard his comrades' pain filled voices, but stood up with his axe that he had not let go while he was falling and attacked the skeletons rolling around on the floor.

"Exterminate them!"

Since the undead took damage from the fall—the skeletons were especially weak against crushing damage, and thus took significant damage from falling—it was easy to mop them up.

Greenham looked around the room only after cleaning up all the undead.

They had fallen into a magic trap which made the floor disappear. Looking up, the ceiling was far above them. At least twelve meters above. Three meters above the floor was a door, and three meters above, for total of six meters, was the open door through which they had first come in. They had fallen about two floors total.

If describing the overall shape, it was like a long pillar. The bottom was shaped like an inverted pyramid, and the slope was steep enough to make someone fall all the way towards the centre if they slipped. Actually one of their comrades had already fallen down and was pinned in the middle by all the zombies that had fallen down.

It was amazing that nobody was hurt after falling from such height.

The strange thing about the layout was at about three meters up from the bottom where there was a closed door. There were four tunnels on each side, for total of sixteen.

“It’s almost like the room was designed to drown people. Like water would start pouring out in massive quantity from that door. No, even worse, it could be something like slimes.”

“I agree. We should look around that door to see if it’s safe to escape through.”

However, it was difficult to climb two floors up on a smooth surface with nothing to grab onto. The rogue could probably climb without a hitch, but for someone wearing armour like Greenham, it was impossible. Comparatively, the door on the bottom had was an unknown, and possibly dangerous, but it would be easier to reach.

Just as they were discussing how to climb, something stuck its head out from one of the sixteen tunnels. It was a bloated corpse, a “Plague Bomber”.

The reason why it was bloated was because it was filled with

negative energy. It was an undead which exploded upon death to inflict damage to the living and heal the undead.

The undead built like a slab of flesh flung itself out of the tunnel. It hit the floor with a disgusting sound, but the problem was what came next. Its circular body could not gain traction against sloped floor and crashed into Greenham's team like a boulder.

"Watch out! Get away!"

"Don't say that to someone who's in charge of all the thinking."

Everyone, including the magic caster who was nearly crying, barely dodged the undead as it kept rolling towards the centre of the floor. When the next plague bomber peeked out, they realized the previous one was just the first of a horde and instinctively knew what was about to happen.

"Run! This room's going to get buried with them."

If anyone was pushed by an undead, they would fall towards the middle and be crushed underneath the bodies. Even if they did not die from being crushed, they would be immobilized and continue to take negative damage by plague bombers exploding from their comrades' attack.

"This trap really is evil. Someone boost me up!"

"Nonsense, then that person won't be able to dodge any attacks."

Even if they dodged the first attack, they would lose their balance and won't be able to dodge the next one. Asking someone to become a boost in situation like that was cruel.

"Then I'll use flying magic!"

"Don't bother with 'Flight'! You can't haul all of us up by yourself."

“Not that! Crap, they’re falling! I’m talking about ‘Web Ladder’.”

“That sounds good! Then to that nearest door please. Greenham, please cover him!”

“—No, don’t bother. We’re going through the door we came through! That door is dangerous!”

There was no time to ask the rationale behind why he thought the door was dangerous, but their trust in Greenham was absolute.

“「Web Ladder」!”

The magic activated and spider web spread up the wall.

This magical spider web had a strange stickiness about it. If one didn’t want to move, it would stick in place, but if one wanted it to move, it would let go immediately. It was a magic perfectly suited to use in place of a ladder.

Greenham’s team climbed with perfect movement, despite their fear.

The one who barely reached the open door first carefully surveyed the area. If they were pushed back here, then it would really be the end.

He breathed a sigh of relief. The worst case scenario had been avoided and there was no sign of undead. After he finished checking for undead, he hopped into the tunnel and pulled up the people underneath.

“We’re alive! To think we were almost crushed to death by undead, it’s got to be one of the worst kind of death out there.”

“The design of this place is just evil. My legs hurt from the fall, cast some healing magic for me.”

“I think negative energy just scratched the tip of the foot when it

exploded. Really scary."

"We were lucky. But please don't ask magic casters to dodge attacks anymore."

Everyone complained while catching their breath.

"Oi, Greenham, why did you want to avoid that door? I thought that door would be the real deal. They usually always have an escape route near dangerous place."

"It was just a hunch… Do you mind throwing a useless weapon at it?"

Greenham replied with his regular tone and the rogue threw a dagger at the door. The dagger flew straight and appeared as if it would hit the door, but part of the door sprouted a tentacle and deflected the dagger.

"That's… a "Door Imitator"! No, considering the colour of the tentacle, it might be an undead Door Imitator. A monster that restrains the opponent with sticky tentacles while attacking them."

"Che, it was a double trap? So evil. But you saw through it."

"It was a hunch. No, to be precise, I simply chose the known over unknown. Plus, that door was at a position where it would keep taking negative energy bursts. Non-living objects like doors would take less damage from the bursts, but I wondered why they would make a door down there. Now, let's move…"

Greenham closed his mouth in middle of a sentence. The rogue who had been talking so much just now raised a finger to his lips and was focusing on listening.

When Greenham listened, he could hear an irregular clacking sound, like something tapping the floor.

Everyone turned towards the tunnel where the sound was coming from.

“Probably an enemy… right? I was hoping they would let us take a break.”

“Yea, and there’s only one. No signs of trying to conceal itself either. It would be good if this was the last one…”

Everyone slowly raised their weapon. The warrior standing in the front received his shield and hid half his body behind it. The magic caster readied his glowing staff to launch an attack at any moment towards the direction sound was coming from. The cleric readied his holy icon and the rogue aimed his bow.

Clack, clack. The sound gradually became louder and the opponent showed itself.

Old, but luxurious robes covered the limbs, which were as thin as a young girl’s, and it held a staff in one hand. This was the source of the sound.

With only a thin layer of decomposing skin, the face had a look of fiendish wisdom and negative aura surrounded the body like a fog.

It was an undead magic caster. Its name was—

“—Elder Lich!”

The magic caster who identified the monster first shouted.

That was right. A monster that spawns when the corpse of an evil magic caster gained unholy life. It was that kind of fiendish monster.

Greenham’s comrades immediately changed formation when they heard “Elder Lich”. No one stood in a single file and they kept their distance from each other in case of an area of effect magic.

An Elder Lich was a strong opponent. It would be challenging for a platinum-ranked adventurer, and relatively winnable for a mithril-ranked adventurer. For Greenham's team, if one disregarded their fatigue, it was an opponent they could easily win against. Fortunately, they also had a member who was especially potent against undead, so they were confident.

Plus if the opponent was extremely far away, it would have been dangerous, but the distance between them was advantageous.

"You must be the master of this tomb."

Greenham had come to that conclusion. Elder Liches were rulers. Sometimes they ruled over an undead horde and occasionally traded with living beings.

There were plenty of infamous Elder Liches such as the captain of a ghost ship which glided across the fog of Kattse Plains, or an Elder Lich which ruled over an abandoned castle. If it was an Elder Lich, then it wasn't strange to think it would be the master of the tomb.

"We've got the right address. Lucky."

"Although killing the owner of this tomb wasn't the request."

"Let's show him the power of "Heavy Masher"."

"Kneel before the blessing of god!"

All his comrades shouted together. It was to shake off the fear of facing against a strong opponent like an Elder Lich.

"Defense magic—"

Greenham tried to shout orders to his comrades filled with resolve, but was surrounded with a feeling of dread. The source of this dread was the powerful opponent standing before them, the Elder Lich.

“…What’s he doing?”

“Is he planning… for a sneak attack?”

The Elder Lich showed no sign of movement against Greenham’s team. It did not raise its staff, nor did it chant any spell, but simply watched them.

Greenham’s companions could not hide their surprise at this. Their expectations of an immediate battle had been shattered. But they also hesitated to strike first.

The undead harboured hatred for all living beings. But certain sentient undead were capable of suppressing their hatred to negotiate. If the living were to offer negotiation, it would usually end up as a bad trade, but if the undead made the first offer, there had been instances of people obtaining ancient items that had been made with now-forgotten knowledge.

It would be the best-case scenario if they didn’t have to fight a strong opponent like an Elder Lich. Perhaps it was anxious because it couldn’t finish them off with traps or perhaps it recognized their skills and was looking for a way to settle things peacefully.

Considering all these factors, it would have been foolish to attack first since it would destroy any chance of negotiation. A hard battle without an established escape route carried huge risks.

Greenham’s companions looked at each other as if they had all arrived at the same conclusion.

It was the leader’s job to talk as the representative.

“Excuse me, we believe you are the owner of this tomb. We are—”

The Elder Lich turned its grotesque face to Greenham and raised its bony finger to its lips.

Meaning: be quiet.

It was not an action fitting an Elder Lich, but nobody was brave enough, no, nobody was stupid enough to say something like that to such a strong opponent.

Greenham closed his mouth obediently. In the hallway filled with silence, he doubted his ears when he heard “that sound” again.

The clacking noise he heard not too long ago. The noise of something knocking on the floor. And six of them.

Greenham’s team looked at each other. They could not believe their ears.

And everybody descended into panic.

“Who was it! Who said that Elder Lich was the master of this tomb?”

“I’m sorry! It was me!”

“What the hell is this? How does this make any sense?”

“Oiiiiiii, how are we supposed to win against this!”

“Even god’s blessing has its limits!”

Behind the first Elder Lich, similar monsters had showed themselves. Six of them.

There were total of seven extremely strong undead magic casters.

As long as they were of the same type of monster, they had similar methods of attack. In other word, if one had a way of neutralizing their attacks, it was theoretically possible to defeat all of them. However, none of them possessed the method to do so, nor was it possible to possess such methods.

In this hopeless situation, Greenham and his comrades lost all will to fight.

“Then, let’s begin.”

Following the voice of the Elder Lich that did not show even a hint of wanting to negotiate, seven staves rose slowly. At the same time, Greenham’s shout echoed.

“Run!”

As if waiting for that command, all of them ran with all their strength in the opposite direction from the Elder Liches. Of course they had no time to think about what would be beyond the tunnel. They only sought to improve their chances of survival against the onslaught of Elder Liches.

The rogue ran at the front, then Greenham, then the magic caster, then the cleric and finally the warrior.

They all ran without hesitation.

A corner. Normally they would be wary of a monster around the corner, but considering the footsteps that came from behind them, there was no time to carefully look around before going. They left everything up to luck and just ran.

On the either side of the hallway, there was a door made of stone, but they were afraid of running into a dead end and didn’t bother opening it.

Loud metallic sounds echoed through the hallway from the people wearing full plate armour, which could attract other monsters, but there was no time to cast ‘Silence’.

They ran and ran and ran.

After turning corners after corners and running down the tunnel at

full speed, they had lost their bearings and could no longer tell where they were. If possible, they wanted to return to the entrance, but they couldn't relax just yet.

"Are they still chasing us?"

Greenham asked while still running. The reply came from the warrior at the back.

"Yea! They're running, too!"

"Damn it!"

"Stop running after us! Just use flight magic!"

"If they use flying magic, then they can just attack while following us, you idiot!"

"Let's lock ourselves in some room and negotiate…"

The magic caster shouted while gasping for air. He was the least physically fit out of all the members and looked as if he was about to collapse. Greenham decided this was not the way to go. They couldn't last any longer.

Undead monsters like Elder Liches felt no such thing as fatigue. At this rate, they would eventually catch up and slaughter the exhausted workers.

"How are there so many Elder Liches…"

It was something that defied common sense.

"Is the master of this tomb something even stronger than an Elder Lich?!"

That was the only explanation he could think of. But did such undead exist? Greenham had no answer.

“Damn it! This god damn tomb!”

The warrior at the rear shouted while breathing hard.

As if waiting for that moment, the floor began to glow in shapes. It was big enough to surround all of Greenham’s group.

“Argh!”

Someone’s voice rang out with what sounded like a scream—

—and then there was a floating sensation, different from when they had fallen earlier.

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Greenham’s vision was nothing but pitch darkness. There was something crunching underneath his boots and he felt a slowly sinking sensation, as though he was being sucked into a swamp. He had panicked for a bit, but it didn’t seem too deep as he stopped sinking after he was submerged to about his waist level.

Greenham spoke out in the realm dominated by pitch darkness and silence, like a lost child looking for his parents.

“…Is there someone here?”

“Over here, Greenham.”

The voice of one of the comrades, the rogue, rang out. He didn’t sound too far away. Probably about the same distance they were keeping when they were running.

“…Is there anybody else?”

There was no reply. It was the expected answer. Considering there was no light, the magic caster or the warrior wasn't likely to be here. He should consider it lucky that at least the rogue was with him.

"…It seems there's only us."

"That means… Che, I guess you're right."

He looked around with taking a step forward. The deep darkness was everywhere and invoked the fear that he wouldn't be able to tell where he himself ended and where the darkness started. There was no sign of movement anywhere.

"Should we turn on the light?"

"Sure thing."

He wondered if their movement would break this silence, or activate a trap, and other negative thoughts creeped in. However, human eyes could not see in the dark and they needed some kind of light source.

"Hold on a moment."

With the rogue's voice, some kind of moving noise came from the darkness and there was a light.

The sight of the rogue holding a glowing stick was the first thing in view. And countless shining objects which reflected the light. It reminded him of the treasures in the mausoleum.

But that wasn't the case.

Greenham barely suppressed his screams and the rogue looked as if he was about to have a seizure.

The light brought up countless reflections. Insects filled the entire room and the identity of the reflections were cockroaches. The room was filled with cockroaches of various size ranging from ones the size

of pinky finger to ones which were over a meter long. Furthermore, they were stacked on top of each other in countless layers.

The crushing sensation and noise by his feet had been the cockroaches. Considering they came up to his waist, he didn't want to imagine how many there were.

The room was so wide, the light did not reach to the walls. Considering the effective area of the glowing stick was fifteen meters wide, he could roughly comprehend how wide the interior was. When he looked up towards the ceiling, he could see a humongous swarm of cockroaches reflecting the light back at him.

"What… is this place?

The rogue murmured in groaning tone. Greenham could understand what he felt like. He felt if he spoke, they would all start moving at once.

"Just what is going on?"

While looking around in fear, Greenham remembered the last moment before they were teleported into the pitch darkness. He thought about the glowing magic circle and asked the rogue.

"…Was it a floor trap?"

"It's probably not the case. Wasn't it something else? A different spell…?"

"A teleportation type magic trap… Maybe the Elder Liches cast it?"

Teleportation magic existed. For example, the 3rd tier magic used for running away, 'Dimensional Move', was one of them, but the caster could only use that spell on himself. Magic like this, which could be used on other people, and multiple people, on top of that…

"There is 5th or 6th tier magic that could teleport a group of people

at once, right?"

"Yea… I think so."

"To think they could use that kind of magic…"

A being that could use 5th tier magic at the very least. It was unheard of. But Greenham could make sense of it. If there was someone as strong as that, then it made sense he would be able to rule over multiple Elder Liches at once and given that they were intelligent, they would be easier to command and control as well.

Greenham realized the true extent of danger lurking within this tomb and a chilling sensation filled his body. At the same time, hatred for the Earl who had made this request started boiling deep inside him. Of course, the people who had taken on this work were Greenham and the other workers, and they had put their lives as a betting chip despite all the risks. They couldn't say anything about it.

But the Earl must have had some information about the tomb. Otherwise, he wouldn't have offered such significant sum of money to gather the workers.

"Did he purposefully hold back on us? Damn it… Let's get out of here fast. This place… it wasn't something we should have messed with."

"Alright, Greenham. You lead, I'll follow you."

The rogue didn't seem to have noticed, or perhaps it was better if he didn't.

The cockroaches weren't moving at all.

Greenham looked around at the cockroaches that surrounded him. Considering their antennas were moving ever so slightly, they weren't dead, but they did not move either. It reeked of unknown danger.

"No, you cannot escape."

The voice of a third person sounded.

“Who’s there?”

Greenham and the rogue looked around everywhere, but there was no sign of movement anywhere.

“Ah, I apologize. This one is Kyouhukou, the one entrusted with this territory from Ainz-sama. Pleased to meet your acquaintance.”

In the direction where the voice was coming from, they witnessed a strange scene. Pushing away the swarm of cockroaches, something was trying to climb up.

It was not at a range that could be reached with a close combat weapon. The rogue quietly readied his bow and Greenham tried to take out his sling and stones, but decided otherwise. He would rush across the swarm of cockroaches coming up to his waist and cut the opponent immediately.

The one that appeared after pushing through all the cockroaches was another cockroach.

But it was certainly different from rest of its species. This cockroach was about thirty centimeters tall and stood on two legs.

It wore a bright red cape decorated with luxurious golden threads around the edge and a cute little golden crown on its head. Grasped in its front leg was a scepter with a pure white gem embedded at the end.

The strangest thing of them all was despite the fact it stood on two legs, its head was facing Greenham and the rogue. If an ordinary insect stood upright, its head would point towards the sky. But the strange being in front of them wasn’t like that at all.

Greenham and the rogue exchanged a glance and decided that Greenham would be in charge of the negotiation. After confirming that the rogue had nocked an arrow and had it pointing downwards,

he talked to Kyouhukou.

“Who… are you?”

“Hmm… It seems you did not hear me the first time. Would you like me to introduce myself once more?”

“No, that’s not the problem…”

Greenham realized this was not the kind of thing to talk nor ask about.

“…I’ll be honest. Do you want to trade?”

“Oh-ho, you want a trade. Since I am feeling very grateful towards the both of you, there is no reason why I can’t listen to your proposal.”

The mysterious words, “feeling grateful”, made him uneasy about what exactly made it feel grateful, but it wasn’t something they could afford to ask under such disadvantageous circumstance.

“…What we want… is for you to let us go unharmed from this place.”

“Of course, that would be something you wish for. But even if you do leave this room, you are currently on the 2nd Floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. I must advise you that it would be extremely difficult to return above ground.”

2nd floor—

Greenham’s eyes opened wide at the word.

“So the door underneath the mausoleum on the surface leads to the 1st Floor?”

“Is that unusual?”

“No, I just wanted to confirm it.”

“Haha, since you were teleported from the 1st Floor, I can understand your confusion.”

Looking at Kyouhukou who was nodding at the structure layout, Greenham felt a chill running down his spine, as if an icicle was stabbing him in the back. It was fear arising from realizing his earlier theory was correct.

In other word, something had somehow used teleportation magic as a trap. What kind of magic would it be and what kind of magical abilities would it require? He was not a magic caster, but he fully realized the implications.

“…Of course, it you could tell us the way out of the tomb as well… Hmmm, no we won’t ask that much. Just let us leave this room.”

“Hmm hmm.”

“We’ll… give you whatever you want.”

“Is that so…”

Kyouhukou nodded and appeared as if he was concentrated on thinking.

Some time passed in absolute silence. Then Kyouhukou nodded as if he understood and started talking.

“This one already has everything one could wish for in its hand. I doubt you would be able to provide what I desire.”

Kyouhukou stopped Greenham, who was about to talk, by raising its front leg and continued.

“But you seem to be confused as to why I was thanking you earlier, so I wish to provide you with an explanation. You see, my subjects

are getting tired of cannibalism. To you, who will be the food that will serve as the solution, I give my thanks once again."

"What!"

The moment the rogue understood what was being said he shot the arrow. The arrow cut across the air but was wrapped around by Kyouhukou's red cape and fell on the ground.

The room started to tremble.

Countless sounds started coming from every direction and crescendoed.

A tidal wave erupted. It was a swell of a black sea.

"It may be unfortunate for you two, but now it is time to have you for dinner."

The gigantic tidal wave swallowed Greenham and the rogue. It was truly as if they were being swept away by currents.

While being rolled around in the black whirlpool, Greenham slapped at the cockroaches that had managed to crawl into the openings in his armour. There was no weapon that would work well against a horde of such small insects, nor did they possess a method for area of effect attacks. It was faster to use hands than anything else. Because of that, they had already abandoned their weapons which had long since disappeared.

He tried his best to struggle and wave around wildly, but due to countless cockroaches holding onto him, he could barely move. It was a movement that resembling someone drowning. The only sound Greenham could hear was that of countless cockroaches crawling about.

The rogue had already been swept away and his voice was nowhere to be heard. No, it was only natural that Greenham could not hear his voice. The rogue couldn't speak with all the cockroaches that had

crawled into his mouth, throat and stomach.

Greenham felt painful stinging sensations from everywhere on the body. It was the pain from cockroaches that had slipped inside his armour slowly eating away at him.

“Sto—”

Greenham tried to shout but was immediately choked by the countless cockroaches flooding his mouth and clogging his throat. He tried to throw up with all his might, but cockroaches kept crawling in from the tiny opening of his mouth. Then they scrabbled around in the mouth.

As if one had crawled inside his ear, the rustling sound was persistent and loud enough to give him chills.

Countless cockroaches crawled and ate away at his face. He felt pain on his eyelids, but he didn’t dare to open his eyes. It was obvious what would happen if he ever opened his eyes.

Greenham understood what would happen to him. At this rate, he would be eaten alive by these ravenous cockroaches.

“I don’t want this!”

He screamed in desperation and the cockroaches poured into his mouth once again. They crawled, trying to move into his throat. Then something mushy, a sensation of something tumbling down into the stomach. Then the disgusting sensation of cockroaches squirming inside his stomach made him want to throw up.

Greenham resisted with all his strength. He didn’t want this kind of death.

He had worked for the status that he had attained with the single-minded goal of showing off to his brothers.

He had gathered enough money to live comfortably without having to work anymore. Thanks to his fame, he could marry a beautiful girl that one would never be able to find in a regular village. He had become a winner in life who had far surpassed the brothers who had denied him their wealth and kicked him out.

He didn't want to die here.

"Abrrwargagh! I'll go back alive!"

He shouted while throwing up the cockroaches he had crushed in his mouth.

"…You are resisting quite valiantly. Then I shall give you some more."

Even Greenham's shouts were buried underneath the black whirlpool in mere seconds.

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His eyes opened.

What came into his vision was a strange ceiling. It was made with stone and had white glowing objects embedded in it. He tried to look around to understand how he got there, but realized his head wouldn't move at all. No, it was not just his head, but he couldn't move his entire body. It was as if something was tied around his wrists, ankles, waist, and chest.

This incomprehensible situation filled him with fear and he wanted to scream, but something was stuck in his mouth, so he could not speak nor close his mouth fully.

When he desperately tried to look around by straining his eyes, a voice spoke.

"Oh my, you're awake now?"

It was a guttural voice. It was difficult to tell whether the voice belonged to a man or a woman.

The one that appeared in his unmoving sight was a disgusting monster.

It had the body of a human, but the head of a deformed octopus. The six long, squirming tentacles attached to its head extended all the way down to its thighs.

The skin colour was milky white, like the waxy flesh of someone who had drowned. On the bloated, corpse-like body was clothing made with black leather which barely covered anything. The cloth wrapped tightly around its body, like butcher's twine tying up a piece of meat, and it could be described as nothing but grotesque. If a beauty had worn it, it would have been attractive, but on a monster like this was nauseating.

On each hand were four webbed fingers. It had long fingernails, with strange and bizarre nail art on them.

This strange heteromorphic being turned its pupil-less milky blue eyes on him.

“Fufufu, did you sleep well?”

“Hff, hff, hff hff.”

Fear and panic. Gripped by those two emotions, he could only let out a harsh breathing noise. The monster touched his cheek softly like a mother trying to calm a scared child. But the cold and mushy feelings of the hand sent chills all over his body.

It would have made perfect sense if the pungent smell of blood or rotten flesh had wafted over, but the creature smelled like aromatic flowers. This only amplified his fear.

“My, to think it’d shrink this much. There’s no need to be scared.”

The monster’s gaze was towards his lower body. From the sensation of air on his skin, he realized that he was naked.

“Hmm, mind if I ask your name?”

It tapped its slender finger on its cheek and tilted its head while asking. The pose would have looked good if it was a beauty, but a monster that looked like a drowned corpse with an octopus for a head only evoked disgust and fear.

“……”

The monster smiled at him, who could only move his eyes. The tentacles covered its mouth and its expression barely changed. Despite that, he knew it was smiling because its bead like eyes had narrowed.

“Ufufu, you don’t want to speak right? How cute. Don’t be so shy.”

The monster’s fingertip slid across his chest as if it was writing something, but all he could feel was fear that felt as if his heart was being ripped out.

“Onee-san will tell you her name F.I.R.S.T.”

It was a seductive and sweet tone of voice that sounded as if heart marks would pop out of them.

“I’m the Great Tomb of Nazarick’s Special Information Gatherer, Neuronist. Hehe, they also call me the “Interrogator”.”

The long tentacles squirmed apart and revealed a circular mouth at their base of the tentacle. Amidst rows of razor sharp teeth, a tube that resembled a tongue came out. It truly looked like a red straw.

“I’ll suck you dry with this in a bit.”

What did it mean by “suck dry”? He tried to move his panic-stricken body, but it was tightly clamped down.

“Now, now. You were captured by us.”

That was right. His last memory was of Greenham and the rogue disappearing from right in front of him. Then he blacked out and woke up to his current predicament.

“You should know where you are, right?”

Neuronist laughed before continuing.

“This is the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The place where the last of the 41 Supreme Beings, Momon— I mean Ainz-sama, resides. It is the most holy of places.”

“Heinhu sawa?”

“Yes, Ainz-sama.”

Neuronist understood him perfectly despite his inability to speak properly and slid her hand across his skin.

“One of the 41 Supreme Beings. He ruled over the other Supreme Beings in the past, and he is very, very cool. If you look at him once, you’ll want to swear loyalty with all your heart, too. If Ainz-sama ever calls me over to his bed, I don’t mind offering my first time to him.”

She fidgeted, no, jiggled as if she was embarrassed.

“Hey, do you want to hear something?”

Like a timid girl playing with her finger, she traced letters across his naked body.

“There was this one time Ainz-sama was staring at my body. It was the stare of a male selecting a target for his hunt. Then he turned his face away as if he was embarrassed. It made my chest tighten and sent chills down my back.”

It stopped suddenly and brought its face closer as if trying to look deep into his eyes. He tried with all his might to get away from the grotesque face, but he couldn't move his body at all.

“Even though that brat Shalltear and that ugly pumpkin Albedo are aiming for Ainz-sama’s attention, I’m still more attractive. Don’t you think so?”

“Wevs E wnph mahs hoo” (Yes, I think so, too.)

What would happen if he dared to disagree? That fear forced him to grunt his muffled agreement.

Neuronist clasped her hands and looked up happily into the air. It looked like a zealot praying up into the sky.

“Fufufu, you’re a good boy. Or are you telling the facts as they are? But why isn’t Ainz-sama calling for me… Ah～ Ainz-sama… Even your abstinence is amazing…”

The way her body twitched in delight called to mind the writhing movements of a giant, squirming maggot.

“…Ha, it makes my body feel electrified. Ara, I’m sorry. I’ve been talking only about myself.”

Don’t mind me. Neuronist ignored his thoughts and continued.

“Now, should I tell you about your fate? Do you know what a choir is?”

He blinked at the unexpected question. Looking at his surprised expression, Neuronist assumed he did not know what a choir was and explained.

“A choir is a group of people that sings hymns praising god’s love and glory. I want you to become one of them, along with all your little friends.”

If that was all, then it wasn’t much. He wasn’t very confident in his singing, but he was not tone deaf either. But was this monster really talking about something like singing? He could not hide his unease that rose like the tide and eyed Neuronist.

“That’s right, a choir. Even fools like you that haven’t sworn loyalty to Ainz-sama can dedicate their voices to sing his praises. The goal is a chorus. Ah, how electrifying! It’s Neuronist’s gospel music dedicated to Ainz-sama.”

A cloudy colour spread in its revolting eyes. Was that because it was excited by its thoughts? Its fingers wiggled like worms.

“Fufufufu, now I’ll introduce you to the ones who will support you in your chorus.”

As if they had been waiting in a corner, several figures came into view.

He stopped breathing the moment he saw them. It was obvious that they were evil creatures.

Black leather aprons that clung tightly to their figures. Their skin was ghastly pale, almost transparent, and purple veins were visible as if their blood was purple.

They wore tight black leather masks with no visible openings, which made him curious how they could see or breathe. Their arms were long as well. They were about two meters in height, but their arms were long enough to reach their knees.

Each of them had a belt on their waist, with numerous tools hanging off them.

There were four of them in total.

“They’re ‘Torturers’. They’re going to help me help you sing a beautiful song.”

A dangerous premonition. He finally realized what it meant by singing and struggled to escape. However, he still could not move.

“It’s no use~. It’s not going to break from someone of your strength. They’ll cast healing magic over and over, so you can get plenty of opportunity to practice.”

Neuronist said this as though she were extending the hand of mercy to him, but she did so in the most evil of tones.

“Thnd du mus!” (Don’t do this!)

“Mmm? Why do you say that? Do you want us to stop?”

Neuronist asked softly to the man who had tears rolling down from

his eyes. Then the six tentacles squirmed.

“Listen well. Because he remained, we, who were created by the 41 Supreme Beings, were allowed to exist. Our very existence is to serve him. Do you think we’ll show even a shred of mercy to some filthy thieves that tracked mud into the holy place where such an exalted being lives? Do you really think that?”

“Auf lirru gwpph!” (I’m really sorry!)”

“Hehehe, that’s right. Regret is a valuable thing.”

Neuronist picked up a thin rod from somewhere. At the end of the rod were spikes that were roughly five millimeters long.

“Let’s start with this.”

Neuronist kindly explained every little detail to the man who didn’t understand anything about the tool.

“My creator used to suffer from a little problem called ‘kidney stones’. To pay respects to that, we’ll start with this. Since it became so small, I don’t think we’ll have much problem putting it in.”

“Thnd du mus!”

Neuronist took its face closer to the man who was screaming out in realization of what would happen to him.

“We’re going to spend a long, long time together. You shouldn’t start crying, because this is only the beginning.”

Part 3

Despite each team picking their own path at the crossroads, Eruya’s

baseless assumption that stronger enemies would be in the deeper part of the tomb was why he chose to keep going straight ahead.

He came across countless corners and stone doors, but he silently walked on. In fact, he was bored that there was nothing happening. Not a single monster nor a trap. Maybe he picked the wrong route. Eruya thought that as he clicked his tongue.

“Move it, you slowpoke. Walk faster!”

Eruya ordered the elf who was walking ten meters ahead of him in a forceful voice. The elf had stopped every once in awhile, but after the order, she trembled a bit and started to walk again. She had been walking continuously since she came into the tomb.

She was lucky so far, but if there were any traps ahead, she would die for sure.

Rather than searching for traps, her treatment was more akin to the way canaries were used by miners. Eruya’s team consisted of Eruya and three elf slaves with distinct skills, — ranger, cleric and druid. Using someone who possessed detection skills as a mining canary was an unreasonable order to give.

But Eruya had his own reasons. It was simply that he was tired of the elf who was walking at the front.

Many would be surprised if they heard it. Not for moral reasons, but for monetary reasons.

Slaves from the Slane Theocracy were not cheap. Especially elves, whose prices varied drastically depending on their appearance or skills. Elves were normally expensive enough to make one’s eyes pop out and were traded at price far beyond the capabilities of an average person.

An elf with skills would go for around the same price as a weapon imbued with special magic. Even for Eruya, they were not something he could buy willy-nilly.

But since Eruya took all of ‘Tenmu’s payment for himself, he could make up for the losses quickly if the quests went well. Thus, he didn’t care if one of them died after he got tired of them.

Next time, I should get one with larger breasts.

Eruya thought that while looking at the back of the elf who slowly walked forward.

I like how they scream when I squeeze their breasts hard.

Because this quest was a joint operation between multiple teams, he couldn’t bed the elves for a few days. No one would have grounds to complain if he did, but jealousy could trigger all sorts of unpleasant events. Eruya had enough common sense as a worker to realize what kind of loss in profit the problems might lead to.

Eruya’s pent up lust made him harbour alternative thoughts.

No, maybe I should get someone like that woman.

The one who came into Eruya’s mind was a member of “Foresight”. The half-elf who had looked at Eruya with hate-filled eyes.

She was truly an annoying woman.

There was a small girl beside her in that party, but Eruya could understand that the small child couldn’t help but look at him with open hostility. It was common for women not to understand men’s desires, and especially for someone of her age, it would be understandable for her to have a certain disdain for sexual acts. But it was not acceptable for lower life forms to look at humans with such eyes.

Just the thought brought out the anger in Eruya’s face.

I want to beat that annoying face until it can’t resist anymore…

For elven slaves, they were broken with all kinds of methods before being delivered to the customer. There was no way elf slaves would show much resistance.

On the other hand, if he targeted that half-elf, she would resist like a mad beast. For Eruya, it won't be hard to break and conquer the beast, but he wouldn't be unscathed and he didn't have much confidence in his ability to subdue his prey alive. While he was imagining slapping Imiya around in his head, he didn't notice that the elf who was leading the way had stopped.

"Who told you to stop? Keep walking."

"Sob…! I h-heard a noise from there."

"A noise?"

Eruya concentrated on hearing while frowning at the elf. The silence was almost deafening.

"…I don't hear anything."

Normally he would have beaten her, but elves had superior hearing than humans. Even if Eruya couldn't hear anything, there was a good chance elves could hear something. To confirm, he asked the two beside him.

"What about you? Do you hear it?"

"Y-yes. I can hear it."

"It-it's like the sound of metal clanging against metal."

"…Is that so."

There was no way a metallic clanging sound occurred naturally. There must be someone making that noise. In other words, his first chance for battle since entering the tomb. He became excited at the

thought.

“Let’s go towards the place where the sound’s coming from.”

“Y-yes.”

With the elf slave leading the way, he headed towards the place the sound was coming from. Soon, Eruya could hear the metallic sounds as well. It was accompanied by the sound of something hard striking some other hard material and the shouts of battle.

“Well, I guess it’s just the other workers. The tunnel didn’t seem to bend at any point, but I guess we’re going to run into another team.”

It was as if someone poured a bucket of cold water on his excitement. He sighed as if he had lost all motivation.

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter. I can fight as their reinforcement.”

When Eruya reached where the sound was coming from, he had a strange feeling. It was abnormal for a battle. It was like—

His curiosity was answered when he turned the corner.

It was a fairly large room, big enough to have tens of people run around freely. Inside were ten lizardmen wearing magnificent armour. They all wore collars around the neck, each with a broken chain hanging off it.

They were swinging swords at each other. They struck with screeching shouts and exchanged blows filled with resolve. It was occurring everywhere in the room. Despite having an appearance of a fierce battle, Eruya could tell this was just practice.

He confirmed it since they stopped swinging their swords when Eruya’s party entered the room.

One of the others in the room was a hulking figure with a gigantic

tower shield, wearing black full plate armour with decorations that looked as if it were covered in blood vessels. And the last person was — no, the last thing would be more accurate.

It was a gigantic beast covered in silver fur, with wisdom gleaming out of its eyes.

“You have finally arrived, intruder-dono.”

There were a lot of annoying monsters amongst the ones that could speak. Magical beasts tended to attack using physical strength, but the intelligent ones often used magic.

Eruya knew he was a genius swordsman, but he wasn’t so confident in magic. He strengthened his core and resolved his heart to counter magic.

“And you are?”

There was no need to ask. If it was waiting here, then it was something that would be defending the tomb. The only question was how strong it was.

From the appearance, it could be the tomb’s master. If he took down this beast, his would be the top contribution. It would mean his team would be the best out of all the worker teams. Since ‘Tenmu’ was pretty much Eruya by himself, it would mean that he was the best worker. Even luck was an important quality for a worker.

“This king was ordered to face you here. I was suppose to test out this and that… but you don’t seem to be much of an opponent.”

He felt disappointed and annoyed at the same time.

Disappointment at the fact that the beast was nothing but a watchdog and annoyance from the fact it was underestimating him.

“To think it would be like this even before we exchange blows…

You.”

“Y-yes.”

The elf trembled when he called her with a low voice. Eruya felt satisfaction at the sight. That was the kind of attitude something should show towards him. Even though it had only been a few days, after spending some time with Momon, whom everyone looked up to, he had become more generous.

“What is that monster?”

“I-I’m sorry, but it’s n-not a monster I know.”

“Tsk, useless.”

He struck the useless elf with the sheath of his sword. Eruya ignored the elf that was collapsed on the floor apologizing over and over again to study the beast.

Due to its size, facing it head-on appeared to be disadvantageous, but monsters were generally like that. And Eruya had killed numerous monsters without a problem. He felt foolish that he was scared even for a moment just because it was a beast he had never seen before. There was always need for caution, but being overly cautious and being scared was incompetence on its own.

“I’ll ask one more question. What makes you think you can win against me?”

“I can tell that you’re weak just from a glance…”

Eruya frowned and gripped his sword tightly.

“…Seems like your eyes are useless. Shall I carve them out for you?”

“You can certainly try. But my orders said it didn’t matter if I killed you here… So why don’t we start?”

That calm tone. It angered Eruya once again.

He wanted to swing his sword without saying anything, but running into the beast that did not seem worried at all would make him look like the weaker one. So he held back and scoffed at it.

“Then so shall it be, beast.”

“Then why are you just standing around like that? Do you not wish to prepare the elves over there?”

“No need. Speaking of which, don’t you want to prepare the lizards standing behind you?”

“Ah, it will be fine. They are only here to observe this king’s battle. Do not worry about them.”

“You’re brave to throw away your only chance of victory.”

“I am very grateful for your praise.”

Sarcasm didn’t work on it. Maybe it was intelligent enough to speak, but not that smart? While Eruya was thinking that, the beast twitched its whiskers and spoke.

“But I plan to kill you without any mercy, so I hope you fight with all your strength. As I said before, this is a test given to this one as well.”

“A test? A test for a watchdog?”

“Hmm~ It’s a test to see if I’ve improved as a warrior. Now, are you ready to start? I’ll leave the elves behind you alone and face only you for now.”

“As you wish.”

“This king’s name is Hamsuke! Go to the other world remembering the name of one who killed you! State your name as well!”

“…I have no name to give to a mere beast.”

“Then I shall erase you from my memory as a nameless fool!”

The gigantic figure leaped forward.

It was an unimaginably agile movement considering its size. A mediocre warrior would have been overwhelmed by the pressure of its approach and taken massive damage from the charge.

I’m different from those losers.

Eruya baited in Hamsuke’s charge and slid to the side without moving his feet.

It was the improved version of martial arts called ‘Shukuchi’, the ‘Shukuchi Kai’.

Originally, ‘Shukuchi’ could be used only to close distance with the enemy, however, this version allowed the user to move freely in any direction. The appearance of sliding without moving the feet looked strange, but it was extremely useful.

Dodging will shift one's center of gravity and break their balance. However, if one didn’t need to move in order to dodge, then one could attack immediately with the full strength of their lower body.

“Tyaaht!”

His sword swung down—

“—Kehut!”

Eruya flew back as if he had bounced off Hamsuke’s body.

It was an extremely hard body. What looked like fluffy silver fur felt strangely hard and metallic, and Eruya felt as if he had been hit by a mace. He nearly whited out from the impact.

The moment he hit the ground, Eruya unconsciously checked his whole body to see if it could move. He had minor bruises, but it didn't appear as if he had any dislocated bones. He could fight on.

The fact he fell on the floor and allowed the enemy's attack to touch him incensed him the most, but the warrior in Eruya told him that now was not the time to think of such things.

As soon as Eruya stood up, he located Hamsuke and prepared to receive its charge once again by extending his sword.

Something sticky flowed from his nose. When he wiped it, he confirmed it was blood as he expected.

"Bastard…"

Hamsuke watched Eruya, who was trying to stand up, with calm eyes. It would be more accurate to say that Hamsuke was observing him.

It was different from a typical beast's gaze of 'Can I eat it?' or 'Can I win against it?'. Those were the eyes of a warrior who was trying to determine the best method to fight from the blow they exchanged earlier.

I'm a test dummy to see if a monster grew as a warrior? Not someone else, but me?

It felt as unpleasant as ever, but considering its agility, he had to admit that it was not an average monster. Within a split second, this monster had predicted that he would try to flank its attack, and launched a jumping bodyslam. It was not a particularly powerful attack, but it could only have acquired that kind of response after training extensively.

"It seems so, indeed… If it keeps on like this, I would win easily. Ah, please don't pay this king any heed. This king has never seen a human that could win against me."

“You should save your words until the end. Unlike a mere beast, a warrior can use martial arts!”

He thought he would win hands down. That was why he was holding back, but now, he needed to be serious.

“Martial arts! 「Ability Boost 」, 「 Greater Ability Boost」!”

These were the martial arts he was most proud of. Especially ‘Greater Ability Boost’, which was not something a person on Eruya’s level could learn.

I’m a genius because I’m able to learn something like this! I’m strong!

He swung his sword and could feel how light and smooth the movement was. The sword moved exactly as how he imagined.

Eruya smiled cynically. The next round would be his.

“Hmm~ I was taught to keep a distance when unsure of an opponent’s strength, but I have to fight as a warrior… I suppose it can’t be helped.”

Hamsuke scuttled over on its two hind legs and closed in.

“Is it going to be close quarter combat? Shall I receive your attack?”

“Don’t look down on me, beast.”

The moment it came into range, Eruya launched his assault.

Hamsuke barely deflected the sword strike augmented with ‘Ability Boost’ using its claws. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say it attempted to deflect the strike, because the sword was still headed for its arm. However, the sword had lost its force after hitting the claws and failed to cut through the hardened fur and the flesh beneath.

Eruya did not retract his sword and immediately thrust it towards

Hamsuke's eyes. Some monsters had hardened eyelids which could deflect even swords imbued with ki or aura. But Hamsuke didn't appear to possess anything like that.

That was why Hamsuke did not allow the attack to happen.

Hamsuke dodged by twirling its body around and swung its tail at the same time.

Eruya blocked the tail with his sword, but the shocking amount of force numbed his arms.

"Khh-urk!"

He spotted Hamsuke twirling around once again. It meant the same kind of force would be striking him again.

Eruya jumped back. He could not determine exactly how long the tail was, but planned to close the distance with 'Shukuchi Kai' the moment it passed by.

But the tail he expected to pass by stopped in midair.

"Urk."

It was a feint. In the meantime, Hamsuke had regained its posture and retracted its tail as well. Eruya's face twitched at the fact he missed an opportunity to attack.

He could see that the tail and the body moved almost independently from each other. It was not like the tail of a rat, but could move independently like the snake tail of a chimaera.

"You can use your tail freely, too!"

Eruya etched the details of the monster called Hamsuke into his mind and charged. Hamsuke, who was waiting for an opening, rushed forward to meet the attack.

Blade and claws clashed. Eruya was the first one to be wounded during the exchange of blows. Hamsuke, who could attack with two claws, held an advantage in its number of attacks against Eruya, who used only one sword. Close-quarters combat was turning disadvantageous. Despite having raised his physical abilities, Hamsuke was still winning. If that was the case—

He retreated immediately with ‘Shukuchi Kai’.

“Hmph, is what I say!”

Before Hamsuke could give chase, Eruya seized the opportunity, raised his sword in the air and swung downward.

“「Void Cutter」!”

The slashing hit cut through the air and flew toward Hamsuke.

Hamsuke braced to protect its face and the strike bounced off its fur.

The strike did less damage the further away the target was. It would be difficult to inflict any meaningful damage like this. But—

“Seems like you can’t block it. This is the difference between a mere beast and a human.”

“This is certainly… troubling.”

Eruya used ‘Void Cutter’ repeatedly.

Hamsuke’s fur was hard and difficult to cut through. That’s why Eruya targeted its face and used the martial art repeatedly.

Hamsuke remained rooted to the spot but spoke through the little crack between the paws that were covering its face.

“Hold on a moment please—”

“Are you trying to beg for your life? As expected of a mere beast.”

“It’s not that — It’s so annoying. Inside this king’s mouth is — Ah, I give up!”

He couldn’t understand.

I guess it’s expected for a human to not understand what an animal is saying… It looks like it’s about to charge now.

“Ah— So loud and annoying! Let’s finish this!”

“Come.”

Hamsuke did not possess a method of ranged attack, so it would try to close the distance at all costs. This was what Eruya was aiming for.

It would be difficult to inflict critical damage with ‘Void Cutter’, so he needed a direct strike to deliver a killing blow. When Hamsuke showed its face like a beast and charged in, he would pin it down with a martial art stronger than ‘Void Cutter’ and keep targeting the face at close range and win.

As Eruya smiled cruelly, sure of his victory, Hamsuke’s tail moved and—

“Gyaaaaaaaahhhhh!!”

The tail struck Eruya’s shoulder like a whip at unbelievable speed.

The shoulder armour buckled and the flesh became pulp. At the same time, the sound of bones cracking could be heard and pain coursed through his body at the speed of lightning. It was so painful, Eruya staggered back while drooling.

Behind Hamsuke, the snake-like tail squirmed. It was stretched out to an abnormal length.

“My tail was too strong as expected. This was why I tried to finish with just close quarter combat.”

Not good.

Eruya barely kept himself from screaming.

If he kept getting charged like this, he would lose.

“You! What are you idiots just standing around for! Use your magic! Heal me! I said heal me! Quickly, you stupid slaves! Do it now!”

One of the elves started casting her spell when Eruya yelled at them.

The pain at the shoulder faded away into nothing.

“More! Cast the enhancement spells!”

Physical ability enhancement, temporary magic boost to the sword, hardened skin, sensory ability enhancement… Even though numerous spells were cast to enhance Eruya, Hamsuke watched on silently.

With so much magic enhancing him, a smile returned to Eruya’s face.

Overwhelming power coursed through his body.

He had never lost after receiving so many enhancement spells. It didn’t matter what kind of enemy it was.

Compared to his normal self, he now swung his sword with extreme speed. He was confident of fighting evenly now.

“Since a monster and a human have different physical capabilities, I’ll fill the gap with this!”

“I was planning on fighting all of you from the start, so it doesn’t make much difference to me. This king was thinking that it will finally be a good fight!”

“Bullcrap!”

Eruya charged. He would crush it with the overwhelming power flowing through his body. He wouldn’t let that beast talk big anymore. While using ‘Shukuchi Kai’, he launched ‘Void Cutter’ to keep it occupied.

“Take this!”

He swung his sword with a shout. If the fur was hard, he would only need to strike harder to cut through.

“Take this king’s 「Slashing Strike」!”

Something sharp struck his arm from above his raised sword.

Something flew into the air and struck the ground, with a liquid sound like a wet sack, accompanied by the clanging of metal.

Eruya didn’t understand.

His two arms, which had been holding a sword, had disappeared. Despite the wounds spurting blood from the severed stumps in time with his heartbeat, he still didn’t understand.

He could see his two arms tightly gripping the sword on the ground, along with the pain which was slowly rising up the ruins of his arms.

As he looked on them, Eruya finally realized what had happened.

Staggering back from Hamsuke, he shouted with a high-pitched voice.

“My arrrrrmmmmmssss! Heal it! I said heal it now! What are you standing around for?”

The elves did not move.

What reflected in their clouded eyes was the secret joy of the abused.

“Alright! Success! I can finally use martial arts! Now I can finally receive praise from my lord!”

“Hiiii!”

Eruya made a splitting scream.

For a humans, which lived in this world with much stronger creatures, to adventure meant to live with constant pain. He had endured much pain until now. He had been struck with lightning, burned with fire, frozen with ice, broken his bones, bitten with fangs, been cut and beaten. But he had never lost his weapon. To lose one’s weapon in this world meant certain death. Or rather, he was confident that he could get out of any situation if he had his weapon.

And now this confidence had been crushed.

It was the first time Eruya had received such a shock since he was born.

“My arms! What are you waiting for!”

Blood spurted out profusely and he could feel his body grow colder and heavier, starting with the wounded area. The elves simply smiled broadly at Eruya’s screams, which resembled the sound of a cracked bell.

Eruya didn’t know how to express the whirlpool of emotion inside of him, but he could hear a voice that could be described as merciful.

“I truly thank thee! I don’t like inflicting needless pain, so I shall end it here!”

Sccchk, something slashed through the air.

Shortly afterward, a shock struck his face. It was the kind of pain that

felt as if it had shattered every bone in his body and was enough to make him forget about his arms.

That was the last pain Eruya ever felt.

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With half its face gone, the corpse collapsed.

“Hmmm hmmm.”

Hamsuke turned its head and slowly backed off. If he stayed close to the corpse, the elves would be wary and not approach the corpse. The elves appeared to be magic casters but could decide to use Eruya’s sword to fight. Hamsuke had no desire to stop them from doing so.

“Now, do you wish to fight as we—?”

Hamsuke mumbled his words in surprise. The elves were kicking the corpse, which Hamsuke assumed was their comrade, with sneers on their face.

“What is this? Is this the elven way of burying the dead?”

Hamsuke doubted that as it spoke. In their cloudy and dead eyes were sparks of hatred. It could only be overflowing rage.

“— This is truly troublesome.”

The order had been to use the skills it had learned so far on the intruders and to show the results of the training. But if he fought an unwilling enemy, could that truly be considered “showing the result of the training”? If they at least stood to fight, it would have been better than nothing.

“I heard that taunting is a good strategy as well… What should I say? I don’t know… I suppose it can’t be helped. I shall wait for the orders from my lord. But—”

Hamsuke turned around to face the one who was judging the battle.

“How was it, Zaryusu-dono? Did I pass?”

“Yes, it was wonderful. The martial art definitely activated.”

Hamsuke smiled brightly at the warrior who had taught him the martial art.

“This is truly a joyous occasion! Then will I finally start with the combat training while wearing armour?”

“That would be the next step. We’ll start with light armour first and then move onto heavier ones.”

Hamsuke hadn’t worn armour until now. It felt too awkward and it was hard to move freely while wearing it. There weren’t many problems when running normally, but in combat, it lost its balance when swinging its tail and could not strike accurately. That’s why Hamsuke learned from the lizardmen and imitated their training to learn to fight.

“Please watch Hamsuke become stronger for my lord! How long would it take for me to properly call myself a warrior? The Warrior Hamsuke.”

“Let’s see… if it’s Hamsuke-san, you would be able to call yourself a warrior in about a month, no, two months.”

“So long!”

“I think it’s pretty short. Hamsuke-san, it usually takes about a year to learn martial arts. Considering that, you’re learning pretty fast.”

Another lizardman beside Zaryusu, Zenberu, spoke out.

“Is that so?”

“That’s right. Real battle experience, healing when you’re injured, fighting stronger opponent with enhancement magic, etc. It might be hellish training, but it gets results.”

Hamsuke shuddered. The rest of the lizardmen did so too as they remembered their training so far.

“…How should I put this. I hope it’s not the kind of training that takes us within arms’ reach of death.”

“Personally, I feel you get stronger more quickly in life or death situations, but… I guess everybody is different. Plus, if the newly wed husband dies, it’ll be pretty sad.”

“Oooh! I now remember that you have married!”

“Yes, and she seems to be pregnant.”

“As expected of a skilled warrior, his accuracy is high! How many times did it take? Only twice or thrice?”

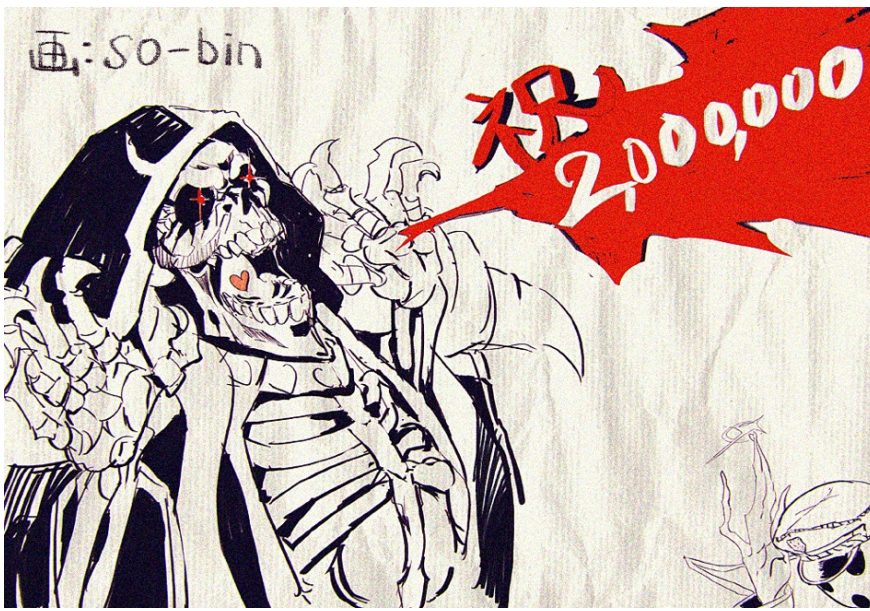
Zaryusu’s fist struck Zenberu.

“Enough. If we don’t start training again, we’ll get a good scolding. Also, what about those elves?”

“Wouldn’t it be fine to leave them like that?”

The elves which had been kicking away the corpse were simply slumped on the floor like puppets with their strings cut. There was not a hint of will to fight, so Hamsuke decided to wait for the master's command unless they tried to escape.

Intermission



Sensing the sudden change in air movement from his nose, the dragon Tsaindoruks Vaision who had the alias ‘Platinum Dragon Lord’ stirred from his shallow slumber. The emotions he felt after waking were mostly of surprise. Maybe startled would be a better description.

Dragons possessed keen senses that far surpassed those of humans. If their opponents tried to deceive them with invisibility or illusions, dragons would still be able to detect them even from a surprising distance. This was true even when they slept.

As a lord amongst dragons, his perceptive abilities were far better than normal dragons. Hence, anyone who wanted to sneak up to him

had to be exceptionally skilled.

Despite his long lifespan, he only knew a handful of people who could pull this off. First would be the dragon lords who were his equals, followed by the assassin Izania of the thirteen heroes, who had passed on from this world. Next would be—

Feeling the presence of the person that just came to his mind, Tsaindoruks Vaision—nicknamed Tsar—twisted his mouth and opened his eyes slowly.

Even in the dark, a dragon's eyes could see as if it was day.

The presence he felt before him was an elderly human with a flashy sword at her waist, standing out in the open with no intention to hide. She had managed to reach this point without being detected by the keen senses of a dragon—a pure and innocent smile of someone who managed to pull off a prank could be seen on her wrinkled face.

"It's been so long since we last met."

Tsar didn't respond as he stared at the old lady.

Her head of white hair was a testament to her advanced years. However, her face had the vitality of a mischievous child, which did not match her age. She had gotten thinner and frailer as she grew older, but her heart remained the same.

While Tsar was comparing her current appearance with the one in his memories, the eyebrow of the elderly lady twitched to a dangerous angle.

"What? Did you forgot how to greet an old friend? Huh, so even dragons grow senile with age."

Showing his teeth, Tsar answered with a gentle laugh.

"My bad. I was too touched from seeing a friend after such a long

time. That's why I reacted so slowly."

In response to the gentle voice no one would expect from such a colossal body, the old lady's reply was sarcastic, just as Tsar predicted.

"Friend? That empty suit of armour over there is my friend… It's all beaten up."

Long ago, when Tsar journeyed together with the old lady and the others, he did so by controlling that armour from afar. Because of this, when his true identity was revealed, he earned the ire of his comrades. It seemed that even now, the score hadn't been settled yet, since this subject was mentioned again and again.

On one hand, he wished that she would finally put this matter to rest, but on the other hand he was also glad to reminisce about it.

Tsar smiled wryly at their usual exchange and looked at the finger of the old lady.

"Oh? That ring is gone, what happened? I can't imagine anyone taking it from you… But it is still an item that exceed the realms of humanity. It must not fall into the wrong hands. Especially the Slane Theocracy or the likes of the Black Scripture."

"Trying to change the subject? But what sharp eyes you have, so this is the fabled dragons' sensitivity for treasure… Never mind. I handed it over to the young ones, so be at ease."

An item like that couldn't just be handed off to someone else on a whim.

It was something that had been made with wild magic. Now, with the powers of magic tainted and twisted, it would be very difficult to create something like that again. His question also bore the feelings of one of the few who could still use wild magic.

However, his friend could be trusted.

“Is that so. If that is your decision, then so be it… By the way, there are rumours that you have retired from being an adventurer? Did you come here to work?”

“That’s impossible. I’m here to visit as a friend. I retired from adventuring and what not. Don’t make this old woman work anymore. My job had been inherited by the crybaby.”

“Crybaby?” Tsar pondered momentarily and remembered. “You mean her?”

Reading the slight emotion in Tsar’s tone, the old lady confirmed it.

“Yes, that little girl Inberun.”

“Ah—” Tsar made a sound as if he was stunned. “I think you are the only one who calls her a little girl.”

“Really? Is that something you should say? I’m about the same age as that child. You are much older right?”

“Well, that might be so… But, you actually convinced that kid to be an adventurer huh? What did you do?”

“Hah. That crybaby kept nagging and complaining, so I told her I will do whatever she wants if she can beat me. And so, I gave her a good thrashing!”

Kakaka, the old lady laughed from the bottom of her heart.

“You are the only human who can beat that kid…”

Tsar shook his head as he spoke with a voice that would make any human break out in a cold sweat. He reminisced about the time he fought against the Demon Gods with the friends he parted ways with. Especially the face of his comrade that performed superbly during the fight with the Demon God of Insects.

“Well, the other party mates will help too. And she knows about undead and the way to defeat them. Even if she loses in terms of pure power, the weakness of an undead will still be the same. No matter how strong the crybaby gets, there will always be someone stronger. For example, you could easily win against that kid. If you didn’t restrain yourself, you would be the strongest existence, even in this world.”

The elderly lady shifted her gaze towards the platinum armour. She thought he would have given a flippant response, but instead his reply was gravely serious.

“That might not be so, the power that corrupted the world might rise again.”

On the right shoulder of the armour was a hole, as if it had been pierced by a spear.

“... So the tremors have come again after more than a hundred years. This time, it isn’t something that will help the world like leader did.”

“...The chances for it being just an unlucky encounter is high, but I could feel that the nature of that vampire was evil. And what a coincidence it was. Was the sudden encounter a bad luck, or was I lucky to have learned about their presence?”

“Two sides of the same coin, just interpret it however you like. I already asked before, but can’t you ask for assistance from the other dragon lords?”

“My answer is the same. It is difficult. To be frank, the ones who survived thus far are the ones who did not fight the Eight Greed Kings back then. And they are the likes of Heavenly Dragon Lord that kept flying around in the sky or Deep Darkness Dragon Lord, who knows what he is doing, holing up in that giant cave underground. I can’t imagine these guys lending us aid.”

“I see. However, there is Brightness Dragon Lord, who mingles with humans while making babies. So we might be able to persuade him,

right?”

“... Maybe. But my personal opinion is that the chance of waking ‘her’ who is sleeping at the deepest level of the sea city would be higher.”

“Are you waiting for that while you dream? If leader left all his knowledge behind, there would be less trouble. It’s a shame he died so early.”

“That couldn’t be helped. He was shocked after killing one of the companions who came with him. It was understandable for him to reject resurrection. Back then, weren’t you shocked as well, Rigrit?”

The old lady looked into the distance, nodding slowly with a pained expression.

“Yes, ah… that is… so.”

“Rigrit, I feel bad about asking this of you even though you are no longer an adventurer, but can you listen to my request?”

“What is it? I have a hunch, but let’s hear it anyway.”

There was a sword in Tsar’s line of sight. It was a sword that was not suitable for slashing. However, it’s sharpness was beyond anything in this world, an item that was impossible to craft with modern magic.

This sword—one of the eight weapons left behind by the Eight Greed Kings—was the reason why Tsar couldn’t leave this place.

“This is something I had been doing all this while, but I hope for your assistance. I beseech you to collect information about items that can match that guild weapon-sword over there. Or special items like the Reinforced Armour owned by the Kingdom’s adamantite-ranked adventurers, Red Drop.”

Chapter 4 - A Handful of Hope

4章　一握りの希望

Part 1

The attack resembled a flood from a broken dam. That was how furious the attacks were.

The enemy was only a mass of low-tier undead. They were nothing for Foresight to be afraid of. However, what could only be described as a human wave attack showed no signs of stopping.

Hekkeran wiped the sweat off his face after beating his tenth group of opponents since the start of the battle, a pair of ghasts.

Although he wanted to rest, there was no time for it. He gulped some water from a pouch on his waist, and signaled a retreat as he calmed his breathing down. However, or rather, as expected, the enemy had no intention of giving them any time to rest.

A group of three skeleton warriors, with a robed skeleton mage mixed into it, jumped out to block their path.

“Conserve your mana!”

“Got it.”

“—Enough, understood.”

In a situation like this where they could be surprised at any time, magic—which could easily deal with any situation—was a trump card they could not use casually. Because of this, they had conserved their mana as much as possible.

That being said, several of their abilities with limited uses per day had already been exhausted. This was the result of being swamped by the large amount of traps and undead.

There were skeleton archers lined up behind barred windows, and out of swords’ reach. It was difficult to deal fatal blows since the

skeletons were resistant to piercing attacks, but Roberdyck was able to exorcise the undead.

He was also able to eradicate the undead that were throwing bottles of poisonous gas at them.

He exorcised the flying undead and the “floor-imitators” which glued their victims to the ground with their bodily fluids.

And he also exorcised a team of several undead that caused all sorts of status ailments such as plague, poison and curse.

All this had taken a heavy toll on his daily uses of ‘Turn Undead’, leaving him with only a few remaining uses. Conversely, they had managed to conserve other abilities as well as mana. The only tough battle had been the one with a flesh golem mixed into a battalion of undead.

“Warning! Multiple footsteps from behind!”

“Undead reaction! There’s six of them!”

Along with Imina’s warning—followed immediately by Roberdyck’s—the tension ran high. The reason why the five skeletons ahead of them weren’t attacking was probably because they were waiting for a chance to execute a pincer attack.

Hekkeran considered their next move.

Several options appeared on a list in his mind. First, they could make a pre-emptive attack on the enemies in front of them and bring them down. Or they could launch a suppressing attack on the enemies in front of them, then turn to attack their pursuers. This plan would require good observation skills to determine the strength of the forces in front and behind them, then take on the weaker group first. They could also use magic to hinder one side, then take the opportunity to break through the other.

They were all effective, but none of them could turn the situation

around. In a moment of inspiration, Hekkeran decided to trust his instincts.

“Hekkeran! What shall we do?”

“Turn back! There’s a path to the side! Retreat there!”

The instant his voice rang out, Imina, who had been the rear guard, ran. Arche and Roberdyck followed her. Hekkeran was one step behind them.

The fact that Imina was running meant it wasn’t an impossible distance. Not wanting to fall behind his teammates, Hekkeran ran as fast as he could. The enemy wouldn’t let them escape easily, of course; the footsteps of several undead could be heard pursuing them relentlessly.

“Have a taste of this!”

Hekkeran took out a bag of alchemical glue and tossed it behind him.

The alchemical fluid splashed out and spread over the ground.

The results were immediate and the footsteps stopped instantly.

Intelligent undead might have made a detour, but such thinking was impossible for lesser undead. Furthermore, skeletons lacked muscles, and thus they found it very difficult to break free once they were stuck.

“More undead reactions! Four from the right!”

“It’s a wall!”

“No, it’s an illusion!”

Four ghouls grunted as they charged through the wall. Although they were scrawny undead that were little more than skin and bones, they

were still a fearsome sight when attacking with their outstretched yellowed claws. That said, there was nobody on this team who would be frightened by such an attack.

“Don’t look down on me!”

Seemingly unaffected by the ambush, Imina immediately unsheathed her shortsword and swung it at the ghoul’s neck. Dirty-looking fluid oozed out of a ghoul in place of blood, and it fell. Beside her, Roberdyck swung his mace with all his might and crushed another ghoul’s skull.

Judging that it was safe to leave those two alone, Hekkeran turned his attention to the rear. They were still being chased. Should he throw another bag of glue just to be on the safe side?

Just as Hekkeran was about to toss one, the shape of a terrifying undead loomed into view.

“Elder Lich!”

At the same time, he noticed lightning crackling on the lich’s finger. Hekkeran was familiar with the spell in question.

‘Lightning Strike’ produced a straight line of piercing lightning, and there was only one way to dodge it.

“—Push the ghouls back!”

Neither Imina nor Roberdyck understood why Hekkeran gave this command, but they obeyed without hesitation.

A bolt of white lightning flashed across the hallway just as the four of them pushed the ghouls through the illusionary wall.

As the air shook with crackling sounds, Hekkeran felt a magic circle activate under his feet. In the next moment, they were enveloped in a pale blue light that they could not avoid, and the scenery before them

shifted.

“Be careful! Stay alert!…?”

Although the ghouls had vanished and the surroundings had changed, they were still on edge from the battle. Even so, after such an unexpected occurrence, it wasn’t a surprise that they were dumbfounded for a few moments.

Hekkeran shook his head, regaining his focus. The most basic thing he had to do—although learning about their current situation was also important—was to ensure the safety of his comrades.

Imina, Arche and Roberdyck.

All the other members of ‘Foresight’ had maintained their formation as the magic circle activated, and nobody was missing.

After mutually confirming that they were all safe and sound, the four of them continued observing their surroundings.

This place was a wide corridor, dimly lit and with a high ceiling. Even a giant could walk freely through here. The flickering flames of faraway torches provided unsteady illumination and in their light the long shadows seemed to dance. Ahead of them was some kind of crosshatched portcullis, and from the square gaps in its surface, rays of white, magical light shone through. Behind them, the path stretched into darkness, and along the way, several doors opening into the corridor could be seen, lit up by torches.

With everyone remaining quiet, only the crackling of the torches could be heard.

It did not seem like they were in any danger of being attacked immediately. After they realized this, their tension eased.

“Although I don’t know where this place is, it has a completely different atmosphere to what we have seen up until now.”

The style of this place was completely different to the tomb they had just left. In fact, signs of civilisation could be seen here. The members of 'Foresight' surveyed their surroundings, and whilst they were trying to grasp where this place was, only Arche's attitude was different from the rest.

"—This place is…"

Keenly perceiving the meaning behind the words, Hekkeran asked Arche:

"Do you know? Or perhaps you have a clue?"

"—I know of a similar place. The Empire's Grand Arena."

"Ah… indeed, you are right."

Roberdyck grunted in agreement. Although Hekkeran and Imina did not say anything, they also shared Roberdyck's opinion.

When 'Foresight' had made their debut at the arena, there was a place similar to this one when they were making their way from the waiting room to the arena.

"Then behind that should be the arena."

Roberdyck pointed towards the latticed gate.

"That should be the case… then being teleported to this place means that… is that what it is?"

"Give me a fight to watch" was probably the intention here. Although, they had no idea who or what might be waiting for them.

"—It's dangerous. Long-distance teleportation is reckoned to be 5th tier magic. Being able to use that kind of magic as a trap has only been heard of in stories. This site must have been constructed by someone with unimaginable skill in magic. It is not favourable for us

to accept the opponent's invitation. I suggest we proceed in the opposite direction."

"But, if we accepted the opponent's invitation, don't you think there might be a path to survival? Wouldn't rejecting the invitation antagonise the other side?"

"Both sides are very dangerous. Rob, what do you think?"

"There's a case to be made for both arguments. But I have some doubts about what Arche-san has said. Is this really a trap laid by the person who currently resides here? Could it be that they're just using something created by an unknown third party?"

They looked at each other and exhaled in unison. There was no point in staying here and discussing the matter further. They did not have enough information and their opinions did not match, but they had to make a decision right now.

"What Rob said makes sense. Who know, maybe it was made five hundred years ago."

"Ah, there were more advanced magic techniques in the past."

"Are you referring to the beings that dominated the continent and whose country shattered almost immediately, of which only the capital remains today?"

"—The Eight Greed Kings. They are considered to be the ones who spread the existence of magic further through this world. If this is a relic of that era, then perhaps…"

"…I see. Then I am in favour of heading out to the arena. In any case, since we were brought here by a trap, they would not allow us to escape."

In response to Roberdyck's statement, everyone nodded as they resolved themselves, and began moving.

When they got close to the latticed gate, it rose upward with impressive speed, as though it had been waiting for them all this time. The first thing they saw as they entered the arena were rows upon rows of audience seats around the arena.

The arena was no less impressive than the one in the Empire. In fact, it might have been even more so, given that it was covered in lanterns enchanted with ‘Continual Light’, which lit the grounds up as brightly as if it were the day.

Everyone in ‘Foresight’ was astonished, especially when they glimpsed the audience above them.

This was because sitting there were innumerable clay figures, the dolls known as golems.

Golems were inorganic creatures created through magical means, who would obediently carry out their master’s commands once they received them. Without the need for food or sleep, and never suffering from fatigue or even the ravages of time, they were treasured as guardians and labourers. Furthermore, because their production took considerable time, effort and cost, even the weakest ones would cost a considerable amount of gold coins.

Even Hekkeran and the others, who were paid well, would find it hard to purchase a golem.

They were valuable constructs, and this arena seemed to be overflowing with them.

To Hekkeran, it spoke of how wealthy the person who owned this arena was, as well as how lonely he felt.

As though they had already come here many times before, they looked briefly at each other's faces before silently walking towards the centre of the arena.

"Outside?"

Reacting to Imina's voice, all that could be seen when looking at the sky was darkness. Because the light from the surroundings was too strong, it outshone the light from the stars, but even so, there was no doubt that above the arena was a vast expanse of open night sky.

In response to Imina's voice, they looked up, and saw the night sky. The surrounding illumination was strong and eclipsed the light of the stars, but even so, it was impossible to miss the fact that this arena was open to the night sky.

"Then, we could use flight magic to escape—"

"TOOOOOH!"

A figure jumped from the balcony of the VIP box, in time with the voice that had interrupted Arche's words.

The figure somersaulted in mid-air as it descended from a height that seemed roughly equivalent to a six story building, making people wonder if it might have wings as it gracefully landed upon the ground. There was no magic at work here, only pure physical ability. Even the rogue Imina had her breath taken away by the perfection of the movement.

The figure who had absorbed the impact with a mere flexing of its knees smiled brightly.

Before them stood a young dark elf boy.

The long ears which emerged from amongst the golden strands of his hair twitched slightly, giving rise to a glorious impression like that of the sun.

He was fully dressed in a suit of tight-fitting, light leather armour, made from jet black and deep crimson dragon scales, over which he wore a white vest embroidered with golden threads. A coat of arms was sewn onto the breast of the jacket.

Seeing his heterochromic eyes, Imina let out a gasp of surprise.

"—Ah!"

"—The challengers have arrived!"

The boy spoke into the rod-like object he was holding in his hand, and his amplified words resounded throughout the arena.

The arena trembled and shuddered in time with the boy's bright and cheerful voice.

Looking around, it seemed that the golems which had remained motionless so far were stomping on the ground to make noise.

"The challengers are four reckless fools who have invaded the Great Tomb of Nazarick! And, facing them is the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the Supreme King of Death, Ainz! Ooal! Gown-sama!"

The portcullis on the opposite side of the arena rose upwards at the same time as the dark elf's voice rang out. From the darkness of the path beyond, a being stepped into the light. In a word, it would be skeletal.

A crimson radiance flickered within the eye sockets of the white skull.

It was dressed in a gown-like vestment, and because there were no muscles where the robe was cinched about the waist, it appeared too skinny for belief. Judging by the lack of weapons on hand, it was probably a magic caster of some kind.

“Ooh! And walking in behind him is our Guardian Overseer, Albedo!”

The members of Foresight held their breath as they saw the woman who followed behind like a servant.

She was a peerless vision that surpassed even the ‘Beautiful Princess’ of Darkness. Hers was a comeliness that could never be reached by human beings, and two horns curved out gently from both sides of her forehead. At her waist were a pair of black wings. They looked so realistic it could not possibly have been artificially created.

The arena quaked with stomping, as if to welcome the debut of these two new entrants, before turning into thunderous applause. It was a reception befitting the arrival of a king.

The two people approached ‘Foresight’ amidst the thunderous applause from the surrounding golems.

“—I’m so sorry,” Arche muttered. “We ended up like this because of me.”

What would follow was probably going to be the most grueling battle Foresight would ever have faced. In all likelihood, one or more of them might die. Arche probably felt that they had been plunged into such a dire circumstance was because of herself. Without her debt, perhaps they might not have accepted this task to go investigate a tomb they so obviously did not know enough about.

But then—

“Hey, hey, what nonsense is this kid babbling?”

“Yes. Taking on this work was a group decision. This isn’t your fault. Don’t you think we’d still have taken it even without your personal problem?”

“That’s how it is, so there’s no need to be worried.”

Hekkeran and Roberdyck smiled as they spoke, and Imina patted Arche’s head.

“Well then, although planning is hopeless at this stage, we should still have a discussion. Arche, can you identify that undead?”

“—Seeing that it seems intelligent, perhaps it’s an upper-class skeleton-type?”

The skeleton in question, Ainz, waved his hand before them. The movement looked as if he was wiping something.

The sounds disappeared. In an instant, the golems’ movements stopped, and once more they were subjected to the almost deafening silence. Hekkeran bowed sincerely to Ainz, who was slowly turning to face them.

“Firstly I would like to apologise, Ainz Ooal…dono.”

“…Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“My apologies. Ainz Ooal Gown-dono.”

Ainz stopped and raised his chin, as if he were waiting for an inferior to continue.

“We wish to apologize for entering your tomb without permission. If you can find it in your heart to forgive us, we will gladly offer the appropriate compensation to atone for our transgressions."

Time passed in silence. Then Ainz sighed. Of course, as one of the undead, Ainz had no need to breathe. But he did so in order to get his

message across.

“Is that how you do things where you come from? After someone else eats in your home and leaves waste behind which sprouts maggots, would you actually show him more mercy than a swift death?”

“Humans are not maggots!”

“They are the same. At least, they are to me. Or, not—perhaps humans are even lower than them. If a maggot is born, the fault lies with the fly. You, however, are different. You were not forced along, nor did you have any particularly compelling reason to come here, but purely for the sake of greed, you attacked a tomb which might have had people living in it, with the intention of plundering its treasures!”

Ainz’s laughter echoed through the coliseum.

“Ah, do not take it to heart. I am not blaming you. It is only natural for the strong to dominate the weak. I have done it myself and I do not consider myself an exception from this rule. It was precisely because there might be someone stronger than me that I was on guard… Now then, the time for idle banter is over. In accordance with the principle of the strong feeding upon the weak, I shall claim one thing from you.”

“No, actually, there’s a—”

“Silence!” Ainz declared in a voice which allowed no interruption. “Do not upset me with your lies! Now then, you shall pay for your foolish mistake with your life.”

“What if we had permission?”

Ainz froze. Apparently, that had gotten through to him.

Hekkeran was surprised that a single sentence could have had such a great effect, but of course he did not let it show on his face. Just when all seemed lost, a ray of hope had shone through the darkness.

Clearly, he had to seize it.

“…Nonsense.”

It was a still, small voice, almost on the verge of fading away.

“Utter nonsense, it’s nothing but a bluff. What do you gain from angering me?”

His unease was spreading, and even the dark elf boy beside him was starting to look uncomfortable. When he turned to look at the last person, goosebumps broke out all over Hekkeran’s body.

The beauty behind them was still smiling. But she radiated a murderous intent that beaded Hekkeran’s brow with sweat.

“And what if it was true?”

“…No… no… it’s impossible. Absolutely impossible. You should all be offerings dancing in the palm of my hand…”

Ainz shook his head and fixed Hekkeran with a gaze that seemed to bore right through him.

“But… however… I… yes, that’s right, just in case, I will hear you out… who gave you this permission?”

“Don’t you know him?”

“Him…?”

“He didn’t leave his name, but he was a pretty big monster.”

Hekkeran desperately thought on where the safety lines to evade danger were hiding.

It was a question that only a person paralyzed by indecision would ask, because only by asking could a person know what was true or

false.

It was a purely human attitude, Hekkeran thought. It wasn't the reaction of a monster, but of a coward. This was a good chance.

"Tell me what you saw."

"…He was very very very big…"

"Very very…"

As Ainz descended into another round of introspection, Hekkeran reflected that they had avoided danger yet again, and breathed an internal sigh of relief. He gestured to his colleagues with small movements of his fingers, telling them to find an exit. Ainz would not act without confirming the truth or falsehood of Hekkeran's words. This was all the time they had to think of how to get out of here.

"Did he say anything?"

Who knows, someone might have used a charm or dominate spell or some other special ability…

"Before that, I hope that you can guarantee our safety."

"What? …If you have indeed gained the permission of one of my friends, then your safety is assured. Do not be afraid."

A new word—friend.

Hekkeran analyzed the information he had just obtained. From the events of the negotiation, he had learned that Ainz Ooal Gown had friends, which he was currently not in contact with.

The secret of trickery was to expose the information your mark wanted, and then force him into a mistake.

"…Well? Why so quiet? Then let me hear what the person you met

said to you."

Up to now, the deception had worked. Then, this would be the next time. His palms sweated profusely.

"He said to give his regards to Ainz in the Great Tomb of Nazarick."

"…Ainz?"

His fidgeting suddenly stopped. Hekkeran noticed, and an "oh crap" expression spread across his face.

"…He said, to give his regards to Ainz?"

Hekkeran steeled himself. After all, words spoken could not be taken back.

"…Yes."

"Kuhahahahaha!"

Ainz laughed when he heard Hekkeran's answer. This was not a happy laugh. It was a laugh that could be best described as volcanic.

"Hah… well, so much for that. Though really, when you think about it calmly, there were bound to be holes aplenty in that story."

Ainz's movements stopped, and he turned to look at Hekkeran. The crimson fires blazing in his eye sockets turned dark, consumed by the black which surrounded them and reducing his pupils to points of red light. Hekkeran and the others took a step back, as though Ainz's mere line of sight was exerting physical pressure on them.

Within that glare was the purest rage.

"YOU TRAAAAAAAASSHHHH! YOU DARE! YOU DARE TO TREAD YOUR FILTHYYYYYY! YOUR FILTHY BOOTS INTO THE NAZARICK THAT I, THAT WE, MY FRIENDS AND I, CREATED!"

So intense was his fury that Ainz was struck speechless. His shoulder blades moved as though he were breathing, and he continued.

“AND YOU! YOU DARE USE THE NAME OF ME, OF MY FRIENDS! YOU DARE USE IT TO TRICK ME! YOU SHITS! DO YOU THINK THAT CAN EVER, EVER BE FORGIVEN?!”

Ainz was shouting in a furious tone.

It would not have been a surprise if his anger had gone on forever. However, his rancor suddenly vanished, and he returned to his usual calm.

It was a sudden change, as though the emotion had simply been switched off. The abrupt change was enough to make Hekkeran and his team, who were facing off against Ainz, think that something was amiss.

“…Although it made me angry, the fault does not lie with you. Of course you would tell an outrageous lie to preserve your lives. To tell you the truth, I’m still very mad… I guess I’m still too willful. Albedo. Aura. And all the Guardians who can hear my voice, everyone, cover your ears!”

The absolute beauty and the dark elf boy listened intently. The boy stuck his fingers into his ears, while the beauty delicately covered her ears with her hands. This was without a doubt to show that they were not going to listen to what he said.

“From the beginning, I was opposed to this plan to invite filthy thieves into my Great Tomb of Nazarick. But that said, I understand that this was the best method and I accept it.”

Ainz looked back up, and regretfully shook his head.

“Well, that’s all. Rant over. As a final mercy, I wanted to grant you an honorable death as a warrior, but now I’ve changed my mind. Now I will dispose of you like the thieves that you are.”

While talking as though it were somebody else's problem, Ainz shed his gown.

Naturally, there were bones below. A dark red orb floated under his ribs, emanating a feeling of dread. He had nothing equipped besides his pants and boots… No, there was one more item. There was a leather collar around his neck, with a chain, broken halfway down, dangling from it.

"Ohhhhh!"

A strange sound came from above them.

Looking up, they could see the upper body of a silver-haired girl leaning out of the VIP box. She was immediately pulled back by an arm wearing what looked like a blue gauntlet.

"…What the hell is she doing?"

"I'll go scold her later."

By the time they had managed to recover their senses and focus them back onto Ainz, he had produced a black sword and a round black shield out of nowhere.

"Then, I'm ready over here. Let's get started."

He stance had his feet slightly spread out—it was a fighting stance.

"Albedo and Aura, you can remove your hands now."

The two people addressed reacted immediately, and returned their hands to their sides.

"I'm in a very bad mood now. To think I would encounter fellows like this. So I'll toy with them without killing them, and I'll leave the disposal to you. Now, let's begin."

As Hekkeran stared down the sword-and-shield-equipped Ainz, Hekkeran's first thought was that his opponent was not a warrior or a swordsman. If pressed, he would say that he was like a monster, the kind who would use their excellent physical abilities to overwhelm their opponent.

Both his posture and stance looked like those of an amateur. But he radiated a heavy pressure, appearing larger than life.

For a being like this, the deadliest move they could make might be to simply attack.

"Not coming? Then, allow me."

Ainz rushed over as he replied.

His was a frightening speed that shrunk the distance between him and his foes to nothing in an instant.

He followed it up with a grand slash downwards from above.

The attack had openings all over it, but it had great destructive power. In the hands of a mighty being with incredible physical ability, it was a sword strike that could kill anything it hit.

Taking it would be very dangerous.

Hekkeran came to this conclusion in an instant, as he sensed the high-speed blade descending on him. A hard block would turn this into a contest of power, and he knew that he would be overwhelmed if he pitted his strength against Ainz.

That being the case, there was only one option—

Ainz's sword struck down into the ground, the lingering echo and vibration of steel against steel fading into the air.

—Parry the blow and guide it away from his body.

Normally, an attacker would be thrown off balance after being parried, and this would be a prime chance for a counterattack. But Ainz had not even moved. It was as though he knew that particular sequence of events was going to take place, and he had reset his stance to its original position.

Hekkeran realized that he had made a big mistake.

No good! I underestimated him! But, the only thing I can do is fight on!

He aimed at Ainz's head. The martial art he used was—

"「Twin Blade Strike」!"

The two swords inscribed gleaming arcs in the air as they scissored toward Ainz's head. Normally, bludgeoning weapons would be more effective against a skeleton-type enemy like Ainz, but Hekkeran was more proficient with slashing weapons, and not nearly as confident with blunt weapons.

His main objective was to try to inflict some damage on Ainz. He flurried as many attacks as he could against Ainz, not caring if they hit or missed, in the hope that at least one of them would get through and strike him.

The twin swords sped toward his opponent's head.

An average person would have taken it full-on.

A first-rate opponent might have only been scratched.

Then what about an elite opponent?

"Hnh!"

Ainz interposed his shield in the path of the swords. Normal people would not have been able to accomplish it, but with overwhelming physical strength and speed, it was possible.

“「Magic Arrow」!”

“「Lesser Dexterity」!”

As the shield blocked the two strikes, Arche’s spell sent a white bolt streaking towards Ainz. At the same time, while the sound of clashing metal still rang in the air, Roberdyck cast a spell to augment agility.

“Child’s play.”

Ainz did not even bother looking at Arche. The missile of light flicked and faded out of existence before it even managed to touch Ainz. A shocked expression appeared on Arche’s face.

“Spell immunity? But from where?”

“Hmph!”

In response, Ainz swung his shield at Hekkeran’s face.

“A shield bash, is it!”

The widely-known basics of fighting skills resounded in his head. Hekkeran decided to turn this danger into an opportunity, and made his move. He aimed at the belly, reasoning that the bulk of the shield would create a blind spot in the defense.

However, Ainz easily swept his weapons aside with the black sword.

He saw through it!

His eyes followed the wall-like shield as it approached, and he barely evaded the blow by the skin of his teeth—and then an armored boot kicked at him from below.

Hekkeran would not have been afraid of a normal kick. However, through their brief exchange of arms, he was fully aware that due to Ainz’s incredible strength—despite having no muscles to speak of—

any attack he made could kill him in a single blow. Taking the hit was tantamount to taking a mortal wound.

Hekkeran rolled away in a panic. Without Roberdyck's support, it would have been impossible. The vacuum in the kick's passing sliced off several of his hairs, and a chill raced up and down his spine.

"This way!"

Imina launched two arrows from her bow. Because she had cried out, it was not a sneak attack, and Ainz casually avoided it.

The arrows flew past him, having missed their mark.

To begin with, arrows were not effective on skeleton-type monsters like Ainz. She had hoped that he would not bother with evading them and casually take the hits, but it seemed that was not going to happen. The arrows she had loosed had flattened heads, like a spade; they were specially-designed magic arrows which would do bludgeoning damage. If they had not been avoided, they should have been able to strike a telling blow even on skeletal opponents.

At least, that was how it was supposed to happen, but even if that was not the case, there was nothing to regret. Hekkeran took the opportunity to stand up and slightly widen the gap between himself and Ainz. Imina's cry had also been to give Hekkeran the chance to rise to his feet.

"「Twin Blade Strike」!"

"Hah!"

The two slashes were easily deflected by the single sword. The shock of the parry sent tremors through Hekkeran's hands.

What a troublesome guy, is this what happens when you give warrior training to a monster with superhuman abilities? Just how strong is he?

The price of repeatedly using certain-kill moves was the rapid draining of mental stamina. His brain felt like it was screaming from his exertions, so Hekkeran decided to back away.

Of course, Ainz would not permit that.

“As if I would let you escape!”

Ainz charged. That was only to be expected—backpedaling was slower than forward motion.

Just as he was about to be overtaken, something whistled through the air as it flew past the side of his face.

A high-speed arrow came from behind Hekkeran’s back, hidden by his body. Naturally, a normal person would not have been able to avoid it. However, against Ainz with his superhuman reflexes, it was still not enough.

“「Flash」!”

“「Lesser Strength」!”

A brilliant flare of light burst in front of Ainz. Whether he resisted it or not, the spell would blind him for a moment, but it seemed pointless against Ainz. All it did was annoy him.

“Interfering busybodies!”

Ainz clicked his nonexistent tongue at Hekkeran, who had closed the gap thanks to his augmented strength and dexterity.

“「Reinforce Armor」!”

“「Anti-Evil Protection」!”

Arche and Roberdyck’s support spells had solidified Hekkeran’s defense.

Having evaded Hekkeran's attack and deflected his swords, Ainz was about to riposte once more when another arrow flew into his face.

"Hmph!"

The casual ease with which Ainz evaded the arrow by simply turning his face was befitting of the ruler of the tomb, and of a monstrous swordsman.

Hekkeran used the brief opening made by the support fire to back away, and sweat coursed down his body from the brief but intense combat.

He already knew this, but Ainz Ooal Gown was very strong.

His physical abilities were completely untouchable by human beings. Worse still, he had the technique to make full use of his superhuman strength and speed. His observational skills could see through feints. He had the measure of every member of Foresight. Combined with his resistance to magic and the enchanted sword and shield he bore; he was everything a warrior wanted to be.

But there was a reason they could stand toe-to-toe with a being like this.

To be fair, he had been hard-pressed to hold his ground. If he had misread the angle of the falling sword and missed his parry, his swords would have been ruined and he would probably have suffered a fatal wound. A small mistake in estimating the speed of the black sword would have resulted in him being sliced neatly in half. The fact that all his coin tosses had come up heads was nothing short of luck.

Yet, there was an even more important reason beyond this.

That reason was teamwork.

It was precisely because they were all working together, and were intimately aware of what each of the others was thinking, that they could move and act like a single organism.

This was how the united group ‘Foresight’ could stand against the mightiest individual, Ainz Ooal Gown.

A faint smile lifted the corner of Hekkeran’s mouth.

Until now, Ainz had been untouched. Certainly, he was very strong. But he was not invincible.

With this conviction in his heart, he swung his twin swords.

Hekkeran’s sword strike, the fastest his augmented body could produce, was deflected by the round black shield. The arrow flying in was interdicted by the black sword. Arche and Roberdyck made use of this opening to enhance Hekkeran even further.

Ever since Ainz had clicked his tongue, his hostility toward them had been rapidly weakening.

After considering whether or not to press the attack, Hekkeran decided to back down and calm his frenzied breathing. The undead Ainz would not get tired no matter how long or how hard he fought, but a human like Hekkeran and the others would become exhausted. Dragging the battle out was a bad idea. He had to rest whenever he got the chance.

“So… as I thought, I still couldn’t deal a decisive blow. I thought had the advantage in strength, skills and knowing what you could do, but when I’m actually engaged in battle, I’m still feeling some anxiety… something like, why haven’t I taken any of you down yet?”

Ainz shrugged his shoulders in annoyance. Hekkeran, who was watching from opposite Ainz, did not feel particularly irritated by his patronizing tone.

Truthfully speaking, this was the advantage of working as a team. Hekkeran smiled as though he had been praised.

In the midst of all this, the beauty who had been silent up till now finally spoke.

“Ainz-sama. Perhaps we should end playtime here.”

“What?”

“Forgive my rudeness, but I find it hard to believe that you would permit continued freedom to these base knaves, these thieves who dared use the name of the Supreme Beings to deceive you. Perhaps it is time for you to grant them mercy?”

“Hey, Albedo. If you talk to Ainz-sama like that—”

“—No, Aura. That is a good point.”

Ainz shook his head.

“And that is enough. I have gained sufficient experience from this battle.”

“Truly marvelous. As expected of the Overlord who rules me.”

“Hah, is it now. Well, this is certainly cause for celebration. Although I know you’re humoring me, praise from a warrior whose skills far exceed my own is still pleasing to me.”

“I would not dream of deceiving you with false praise. I meant every word of it.”

“Is that so? Then thank you. Cocytus can evaluate me later, and I still need to hear your opinions on future training sessions like this.”

After nodding a few times and looking very satisfied with himself, Ainz turned back to ‘Foresight’.

The air between them had changed, and Hekkeran had a bad feeling about it.

His instincts that had carried him through many life-and-death situations were screaming to him: *there is great danger here*.

“Then, playing around with swords is over. Now is the time for a different kind of amusement.”

Ainz cast aside the sword and shield he was holding, and they vanished before they hit the ground.

“What?!”

Discarding one’s arms was the universal sign of giving up the fight. However, Ainz’s attitude did not betray even the slightest hint of capitulation.

This was not a gesture of surrender.

Unable to figure out what Ainz was thinking, Hekkeran was filled with confusion.

“…What are you going to do?”

At this, Ainz smiled. Or rather, he seemed to smile.

He slowly spread his arms. It was an action that resembled an angel reaching out to the faithful, or a mother welcoming her child into her embrace; a loving acceptance of what lay before him.

“You don’t get it? Then let me put it in terms you might be able to understand,” Ainz laughed. “I’ll play with you, so give me your best shot, humans.”

The mood had changed—

He had forsaken his weapon and his shield. That should have meant he had been weakened. But Hekkeran had the feeling that the Ainz before him now was more powerful than before. Indeed, it seemed as though his body had physically grown in size before their eyes, so oppressive was his presence.

A being that grew stronger when abandoning the sword.

When you thought about it, only two answers remained. One would be that he was one of those warrior monks who honed their bodies into living weapons. But if that were the case, his fighting style from earlier—the way he evaded attacks—didn't seem polished enough for him to be one of their number.

Then, the alternative—

"He's a magic caster?"

The voice belonged to Arche, who had reached the same conclusion Hekkeran had.

That was it. This was the question at hand. The being before them, Ainz Ooal Gown—was he a magic caster?

It was understandable that they had not considered that earlier. Who could have imagined that any magic caster could have fought on even terms with Hekkeran, the party's strongest and most skilled fighter?

Magic casters—especially arcane magic casters—had weaker bodies than warriors. After all, if one had time to train one's body, one could easily spend that time on learning magic. As such, magic casters who could fight on par with warriors were nonexistent.

That was simple common sense.

A being who could turn that wisdom on its head—who could have imagined such a being would be standing in front of them?

As such, Arche's voice carried the hope that it was untrue, and the desire that her hypothesis would be rejected. Because if it were true, that would mean that Ainz was far more confident in his skills as a magic caster than he was as a warrior.

What that meant, nobody needed to say out loud.

Even casting a few spells could greatly improve battle performance. As Hekkeran had been demonstrating, several enhancement spells made a dramatic difference. But if that was the case—

“Did you finally realize it? How foolish you lot are. Well, it’s only natural to expect this level of intelligence from you miserable vermin, who track your filth into my—no, our Nazarick.”

However, as long as Arche was around, Hekkeran and the others could deny it.

“Arche! Is this guy a magic caster?!”

“No! I’m sure of it! At least, he’s not an arcane magic caster!”

“Hm? And what is that supposed to mean?”

“—I can’t sense any magical power from your body.”

“Ahhh. So, you use detection spells, then. How rude.”

Ainz showed Hekkeran and the others his hands. As one might expect of an undead, there was nothing of them but bones. He spread his fingers to show that each of them, on both hands, was wearing a ring.

“Once I remove this ring, you will understand. I also lent it to my subordinates.”

Saying that, Ainz removed a ring on his right hand. And then—

“Uuuuoooggh!”

It was the sound of vomiting. Sticky fluid spilled onto the floor of the arena, and a sour, rancid stench wafted up around ‘Foresight’.

“What did you do?!”

Imina glared at Ainz, from where she had rushed over to assist Arche.

Ainz seemed a little uncomfortable, but still answered in a displeased tone.

“What do you mean, what did I do to that girl? There’s a limit to how rude you can be, throwing up when you see someone’s face.”

“—E-everyone, run!”

Arche was shouting, and tears were leaking from the corner of her eyes.

“This guy is a mon—uuuurrrrrggghhh!”

Unable to endure it, Arche threw up again. In that moment, Hekkeran understood why she had vomited.

Ainz had done nothing to her. Rather, she had been unable to withstand the combination of terror and stress caused by seeing the enormous magical power surrounding Ainz, and so she had thrown up.

And that meant—

“—We can’t beat him! His strength is on a totally different level! Even the word monster can’t describe him!”

Arche began wailing as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“No way no way no way—”

Imina tightly hugged Arche to her chest. The girl was violently shaking her head as though she had gone mad.

“Calm down! Roberdyck!”

“Got it! 「Lion’s Heart」!”

Under the influence of Roberdyck’s magic, Arche managed to recover

from the panic which had gripped her. Like a newborn deer, she rose unsteadily on shaky legs, using her staff as a crutch.

“—Everyone, we have to flee now! That’s not a being humans can beat! It’s an unbelievable monster!”

“Understood, Arche!”

“Yeah, I get it. When he removed the ring, the entire world seemed to change. I felt it raise goosebumps all over me.”

“Yes. Powerful wouldn’t nearly be enough to describe this monster.”

The alertness level of the three of them had gone through the roof. The stared at Ainz with nerves wound even tighter than before. Theirs was an expression that understood that even an instant’s loss of watchfulness would spell their deaths.

“It looks like they won’t let us run.”

“The moment we show them our backs, we die. Although I have the feeling that just averting our eyes would be enough.”

“We need to buy time or we won’t make it.”

“…Not coming?”

Of course, Hekkeran wouldn’t be baited by Ainz, who was lazily scratching his skull with one long finger. The enemy’s fighting power vastly exceeded that of any being which had ever existed. That meant they could only count on one thing.

When Ainz began casting a spell—a magic caster was most vulnerable when reciting an incantation. If he used a silent spell, then the game was up, but even so, that was a tiny possibility which existed for them.

As though drawing a bow taut, Hekkeran gathered his strength

within himself.

“Then I will go. 「Touch of Undeath」.”

“What kind of magic is it? Arche!”

“I don’t know! I’ve never heard of it before!”

The black fog which covered Ainz’s right hand was an unknown magic which put them all on their guard. Hekkeran tensed his legs, ready to dodge at any time. His companions behind him were also wary for an area-of-effect attack, and began spacing themselves out.

Instead, Ainz began walking towards them.

Hekkeran’s eyes went wide. It was a totally unguarded and defenseless movement method. Those were not the movements of a man that was a skilled warrior. He knew was that it was a trap, but he didn’t know what Ainz was aiming at.

Is he trying to use magic for something… or was that spell a close-range type? Or was it a defensive type?

Hekkeran was familiar with the more famous spells, but Hekkeran was not a mage by profession, and couldn’t understand Ainz’s intentions.

“Stay away!”

Imina’s angry cry pierced the air, as did the arrows she launched at Ainz.

Using a special technique, she had launched three arrows at once, but Ainz deftly knocked them from the sky with a bony hand.

“…You’re in the way.”

It was a small but cold voice.

The red blaze in the empty eye sockets flickered, but it was only Hekkeran, who was up front studying Ainz's every move, who noticed it.

Just as the bad feeling struck, Ainz's form vanished.

Hekkeran turned, trusting his instincts. In his eyes, he saw his companions' shocked faces. However, there was no time to explain. Especially to Imina. Ainz was standing behind Imina, slowly reaching his hand out to her.

Imina! She didn't notice! I need to—no, this isn't the time for such useless actions!

As he used a martial art to move at top speed toward Imina, a twinge of confusion ran through Hekkeran.

Was it wise to protect Imina?

Compared to Arche and Roberdyck, who could use support spells to enhance people, Imina's usefulness and importance were relatively low. The best way to increase their survival rate was to discard the stumbling blocks at their feet.

However—

Dammit!

This was the wrong thing for a leader to do. Even though this was almost equivalent to betraying his comrades, Hekkeran did not slow his steps at all. Emotion overruled reason in this matter.

He wanted to save Imina. That was all.

An image of Imina lying on his bed appeared in his mind's eye. He smiled bitterly to himself, because in a life-and-death situation, all he could think about was her curveless body.

Even so—he put even more power into his feet.

This was the strength of a man who wanted to protect his woman.

“Get away!”

Hekkeran’s sudden charge created confusion, and thus an opening. Before Ainz could touch her, Imina was knocked out of the way.

Ainz was deciding which should be his priority—reducing their pain, the small whimpering voice in his head was saying—the man who had appeared in front of him, or the woman who got away.

“Hey! It’s me, dumbass!”

He followed up his yell with a martial art.

First, he used ‘Limit Breaker’. There would be a price to pay, but it increased the amount of martial arts he could activate at the same time. Next was the technique which made his body feel like something was being broken inside it, ‘Dull Pain’. After that was ‘Physical Boost’, ‘Iron Fist’ and the augmented ‘Twin Blade Strike’.

His greatest attack was born from these.

His twin swords glowed.

Hekkeran was counting on the fact that Ainz would be used to his sword attacks from their earlier exchange, so the sudden change in speed would confuse his senses and make it harder to evade. It was the foreshadowing of a strike which would end the battle in a single blow.

Ainz did not react to it.

Got him!

Just as he imagined his swords slicing into the defenseless skull, the

sensation which travelled up his hands was definitely not the feeling of steel cutting into bone.

Slashing immunity?!

He had had similar experiences during his adventures as a worker.

He's immune to both slashing and piercing attacks? What kind of monster is he?!

As Hekkeran tried to retreat in a panic, he felt an icy-cold sensation enveloping his forehead. It was Ainz's hand. Hekkeran felt like he had been clamped in a vise, wanting to escape yet unable to move.

"Hekkeran!"

"Imina! He's immune to slashing!"

Hekkeran tried to shrug off the intense pain and report what he had learned to his colleagues. While he was grasped by the head, he felt his entire body being lifted up. Although he hammered the hilts of his swords into Ainz's arm, the grip on his head showed no signs of loosening.

"Wrong. It doesn't matter if you use piercing, slashing or bludgeoning —none of the weak attacks you can muster can do so much as put a scratch on me."

"…That… what? The hell, what kind of con game are you running? That's not fair!"

"He's lying! Imina, if that were true, there would be no reason to fight at all. He must have some kind of weakness!"

"—I won't fall for it!"

"It's truly sad when you can't even believe the truth that's right in front of you. I would have imagined that you would have realized

from the melee battle, and the conversation we had, that you were nothing more than useful test subjects. Did that little skirmish we had give you the hope that you could actually win here? Consider that my mercy to you in the hell that is to come."

"What kind of mercy is that? You piece of shit, you goddamn bastard, let Hekkeran go!"

The arrow arrived at the same time as her voice. However, Ainz simply remained still, and the pain in Hekkeran's forehead continued unabated.

"Do you really want to do that? You might hit this man."

The pain had Hekkeran gripped in terror, the terror that at any moment his head might be crushed by the hand holding it. Although he struggled, Ainz did not shift a millimeter. It was like attacking a steel block—the only thing Hekkeran hurt was himself.

"Did that hurt? Don't worry. I won't kill you like that. A miserable little thief like you does not deserve that mercy—「Paralysis」."

His body was frozen. No, it wasn't frozen, it was paralyzed.

"Hmm, if I used 'Paralysis', then maybe 'Touch of Undeath' was kind of a waste."

Hekkeran heard the words, but he did not understand them.

Imina's bowstring hissed as she sent a continuous stream of projectiles downrange, but the only response was quiet laughter.

"So, how far can you… no, please, struggle as much as you want. That will only deepen your despair."

Run away.

Hekkeran's mouth would not move to make the sounds he wanted.

This was an opponent they could not simply evade just by running away. But fighting would be even more foolish. This was especially true given that once the vanguard was taken down, the battle line would collapse.

“Then, who will be next? Of course, you can all come at once, but that would be too boring, no?”

Imina turned to look at Hekkeran, who was lying on the floor of the coliseum.

He wasn’t dead. But he looked like it. There was no way she could save him from the clutches of the logic-defying monster known as Ainz Ooal Gown. But even so—

“—You idiot! Just by common sense, you should have abandoned me! You dummy!”

She was angry.

“Idiot, idiot, idiot, stupid idiot! You moron!”

“…Directing abuse to a man who so gallantly risked himself to protect his comrades is only going to upset me, you know.”

It was a statement that showed a complete lack of understanding for Imina’s feelings. Then again, their opponent was a monster; trying to make him understand human emotions would be impossible.

“I already know that! I don’t deserve such a great leader!”

She took a breath.

“But still! You’re still an idiot! Running on your emotions like that!”

“…What?”

Don’t be confused…

Imina thought to herself. She was trying to suppress the feelings of a woman who wanted to save her man.

She had to abandon Hekkeran and bring this information back. She had to tell the outside world about these ruins, about the fearsome monster which inhabited it, and depending on how things went, they might even need to assemble a punitive force to deal with it.

—Demon Gods…

Two hundred years ago, the Demon Kings that inhabited the barren continent must have been beings like that.

It felt as though the world she was living in had been touched by myths and legends. It clearly couldn't be like this, but some part of her, deep in her heart, was insisting that this was just a dream.

Legends, huh? It sounds so bizarre when you put it that way. It's heroes that ought to be fighting a monster like this—

Inspiration struck in a flash.

That was it. The ones who battled the demon gods were the Thirteen Heroes—they were heroes. Then, the only one who could fight Ainz was also a hero.

"Give Hekkeran back! If we don't return by the stipulated time, the strongest people in the world will force their way into this tomb! If we can return unharmed, you can use us to negotiate!"

"What is this, lies again?

Ainz sighed, a silent *haah* sound. Sweat beaded on Imina's brow, that was genuine.

"No, I'm not lying."

"—Albedo. Is there anyone who could be considered strong on the

surface?”

“There are none, I believe she is just spouting meaningless lies.”

“It’s not a lie!”

The girl behind Imina was shouting.

“The adamantite-ranked adventurer Momon from “Darkness” is there! He’s the greatest warrior of them all! He’s stronger than you!”

For the first time, Albedo appeared perturbed. She looked to Ainz, panic written on her face, and lowered her head to him.

“M-my apologies! There is such a being! P-please, forgive me!”

“Mmm… ah, yes, I didn’t even notice, Albedo. Momon of ‘Darkness’, hmm. About him… forget it, it’s not important. He cannot defeat me.”

He had been acting like a demon king until now, but the way he was slumping his shoulders suggested that he was hiding something. Exactly what he was hiding, nobody could tell.

“Momon is strong! Stronger than you!”

“…Ah, well, that’s hardly grounds for negotiation, Give it up.”

Ainz waved his hand lazily to dismiss the topic.

“Now then, shall we start again?”

The time for idle chatter was over.

“Arche! Run!”

Roberdyck shouted, and Imina agreed.

“Yes, run!”

“Look up! This is probably the outside! If you fly, there’s a chance you can escape! Run, even if it’s only you! We’ll try to buy you some time, a minute, no, ten seconds!”

“Now that is an interesting idea. Aura, open the exit. I will humor them.”

“Understood!”

Ainz pointed at the direction Roberdyck and the others had entered from. Aura leapt up, the bottoms of his shoes glowed, and his body disappeared.

“Now then, Aura has gone to open the gate. Go ahead and flee. Abandon your comrades. Who was the one who wanted to run again?”

Ainz extended his hand. His skeletal face could not display any expressions, but from his gesture, it was clear enough. If he had flesh, it would have been twisted into an evil smile. It would have been a smile that eagerly anticipated these comrades to fall into infighting.

Workers were different from adventurers; they formed parties based on the power of money and useful relationships, and in a situation like this, the odds of them fleeing would be quite high. However, Foresight was different.

“Arche, run now!”

“Yes, run,” Imina smiled. “You still have your sisters, right? Then leave us and go. That’s what you should be doing!”

“How could I? This is obviously all my fault!”

Seeing that Ainz had no intent to press the attack, Roberdyck walked over to Arche, and then withdrew a small leather pouch for her to

hold on to.

“It’ll be fine. We’ll beat that monster Ainz and then come right after you.”

“When that happens, you’re buying the drinks.”

Imina also drew forth a small pouch for her to hold.

“Then, go. Use the money I left at the inn as you wish.”

“Mine too.”

“…I’ll hold you to that. Then, I’ll be going first.”

Of course, none of the three actually believed it.

Defeating the being called Ainz, whose power was far beyond their imagining, was something they could not even hope to do. Arche knew that this was their final farewell, and she was choking back her tears as she cast her spell.

“There are monsters in the sky that might still catch you even if you run…”

“— 「Flight」!”

Ignoring Ainz’s warning, Arche’s spell took effect. She looked to her comrades one last time, and then took to the air without another word.

“…Ah, is that how it is. Well, it’s less tiring than running,” Ainz said in a casual way.

“However, it’s quite remarkable that you decided it without fighting with each other. I thought I would see your disgusting true selves on display here.”

“You would never understand. It’s because we’re comrades.”

“That’s true. Dying to protect a comrade is not a bad thing—”

A flash of insight struck Imina.

“—Were your comrades the friends you spoke of?”

“Muuu!”

“Your comrades must have been exceptional individuals, no? Then, our relationship is as close as theirs, and yours.”

“That’s right.”

The evil atmosphere vanished as though it had never been, and Ainz continued in a quiet tone.

“Greater love hath no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends—so it was written in the Gospel of Mark.”

“…It’s all right if we die. However, for our sake of the bond that we share, that you yourself, and your exceptional comrades shared, please let her go.”

“Mm…”

Ainz hesitated for several seconds, and then shook his head.

“There will be no mercy for thieves like you. All that awaits is suffering upon suffering upon suffering, followed by death. But for the sake of the lives that you are willing to throw away for your comrade, you may bid her farewell. Shalltear.”

Ainz carelessly showed his back to them, and called out to the VIP box. There was no chance he would be hurt, and it showed in his attitude.

No, that was the reality of it. There was no attack they could use which would work. This was mere fantasy after understanding the truth of things. The two of them had no method which could wound the monster called Ainz. Because of this, they could calmly turn their heads back. At the very least, they had to buy Arche the time to flee.

Although they had no cards to play, they still had to do it. Imina and Roberdyck exchanged looks, and nodded.

On the other hand, a girl's voice came from the VIP box in response to Ainz's voice.

She was a human girl with hair that gleamed like platinum. Although the two of them were filled with anger, they could not help but be captivated by that beauty, their eyes drawn to the girl who possessed it.

Suddenly. the beautiful girl shifted her line of sight to look at the two of them. Her eyes were an entrancing crimson. Imina felt as though they were squeezing her heart. Similarly for Roberdyck, he was having trouble breathing with the crushing pressure on his chest.

Even after the girl's eyes left her, Imina still didn't feel like she could move freely.

"Shalltear, teach that child the meaning of terror. Teach her the gulf between the sliver of hope for escape that she clings to, and the inescapable reality that awaits all who dare invade the Great Tomb of Nazarick. After that, do not cause her any pain, but slay her with the deepest and sincerest mercy."

"Understood, Ainz-sama."

The girl—Shalltear—smiled to Ainz. However, when Imina saw that smile from the side, a chill ran down her spine. Her instinct told her that this was a monster draped in a very beautiful skin.

"Do enjoy the hunt."

“That was my intention.”

Shalltear bowed deeply to Ainz before setting forth. Every step she took was one closer to ending Arche’s life, but even if Imina knew it in her mind, there was nothing they could do about it. Imina and Roberdyck were both unable to move.

Shalltear walked past them without any sign that she had noticed them, without paying them the slightest bit of attention. Perhaps Foresight could close the distance between themselves and Shalltear immediately if they ran after her, but she seemed so far away.

“What’s this? Still not coming? If you have time to talk, you have time to fight… How unexpectedly honorable of you.”

He was not looking down on her. His sentiment was genuine. In response to it, Imina’s fighting spirit recovered somewhat.

“Wait! A question, please! What happened there, where is the mercy in that?”

“A priest… then, I will tell you. In my Nazarick, a death without further suffering is mercy enough.”

Silence descended upon them. They would no longer speak with words, but weapons.

“Let’s go, Rob!”

“Yes! Ohhhhhhh!”

With an uncharacteristic battlecry, the charging Roberdyck brought his morningstar down on Ainz’s face. It was a strike that considered nothing but the full use of his strength. It was precisely because he thought that Ainz would not evade it that he put all his might into the blow.

Although Ainz took a strike made with all of Roberdyck’s strength, he

did not react with pain as expected. Roberdyck followed up his attack, reaching out with his bare hand.

“「Cure Moderate Wounds」!”

The healing spell was targeted at Ainz. When exposed to healing-type magic, undead would take damage instead. However, like the attack spell Arche cast earlier, it vanished uselessly against an invisible wall.

“Ahhhhh!”

Imina tensed her bowstring as she cried out. Then—she loosed. Although Roberdyck was next to Ainz, she was not nearly bad enough to actually hit him. Rather, at this range, there was no way she could miss.

Yet—the arrows struck Ainz, and fell to the ground without doing any damage whatsoever.

Ainz vanished.

It was the same tactic as earlier.

“Teleportation!”

“Not quite.”

As expected, the voice came from behind.

“I—”

Before Roberdyck could finish, Ainz’s hand gently settled on Imina’s shoulder. There was no hint of enmity in that gesture.

However, it had a telling effect. All the strength in her body vanished, and she slumped to the ground. Although her mind was fully functional and conscious, her body felt like a puddle of immobile, insensate slime.

“What did you do to her?”

Roberdyck asked his question in a trembling voice, as his eyes went from Imina to Ainz, who stood by her side.

“Was that a surprise? It’s nothing special.”

Ainz proceeded to explain in such a way as to break Roberdyck’s spirit.

“It was almost the same as just now. After casting a silent ‘Time Stop’ I moved over here and cast the same spell I used on that man, ‘Touch of Undeath’. And then, I just touched her.”

The silence felt as though the space between them had been frozen. The sound of Roberdyck swallowing was exceptionally loud in comparison,

“…He stopped time…”

“Oh yes. Anti-time stop countermeasures are very important, don’t you know? You’ll need to have them by the time you hit level 70. Oh well, you’re going to die here, so in your case, it’s largely academic.”

Roberdyck grinded his teeth.

He was lying. If only he could say that. If only he could deny everything this monster—this *god*—was saying. It would be better if he fell to his knees and clutched his ears to shut the words out.

He understood that Ainz was very powerful.

However, even with that considered, stopping time and the like was something that should not exist in this world.

The march of time was a flow that could not be mastered or controlled by humanity. What could he do against a foe who was capable of such a feat? Cutting down an entire forest with a single

sword would be an easier goal in comparison.

Ainz Ooal Gown. He was a being that the human race could never defeat. He was a man who stood at the cusp of divinity.

He gripped his mace in both hands—

—and he felt a light tap on his shoulder.

“Ah…”

Roberdyck’s body stopped moving. He did not have to look to know who had done it. It was Ainz Ooal Gown—that godlike being who could control the passage of time—who was supposed to be standing in front of him. When had he vanished from his field of vision?

The cold flowing into him made him feel as though he had turned into an ice sculpture. Thus, any feeling and freedom were stripped from his body.

“—It was useless, wasn’t it?”

So spoke the gentle voice which carried no trace of enmity to Roberdyck. The mace fell from nerveless fingers, to the ground—

Then, Ainz muttered as he looked to Roberdyck who had lost all will to fight.

“Well, that was a waste of effort. I think I might have actually broken a sweat.”

It was completely useless. Every tactic and trick he had tried could not do even the slightest bit of damage to Ainz.

The thoroughly defeated Roberdyck looked quietly at Ainz, and calmly asked him a question.

“I have something to ask. What is to become of us afterwards?”

“Mm? Is it because you’re a divine magic caster and you think you won’t end up in the same state as those other two?”

With that as a premise, Ainz began his explanation.

“Well then, about those two. Aura, take them to the Large Cave. Gashokukochuuou says he’s running out of nests.”

The dark elf’s ears twitched, and her eyes went wide.

“Ai-Ainz-sama! Mare! I can order Mare to go instead, right? Make him go there instead!”

“Oh, hm. Fine with me.”

“Understood! I’ll let Mare go instead!”

“As for that, I apologize. There will be no kind fate in store for them. As for you—the subordinate I sent in pursuit is also a divine magic caster, but the god she believes in is completely different from the gods you worship. When it comes down to it, I have no idea what the Four Gods you worship are. As such, I need to confirm the details on them. As their subordinates, you have names for them, but whether they’re the Four Gods or the Six Gods, these names are little more than job titles, like the Fire God, Earth God, is that it?”

“That, I don’t know about that.”

“I see… so they’re not superior beings who possess a mysterious power, they’re nothing more than great men of the past who’ve been deified—”

“—how could that be?!”

“Well, do listen. That’s just my theory. But if that were the case, if you do borrow the power of the gods to work your magic, could dead people provide it to you? Or rather, what are the gods? Do they even exist? Are you really using the power of the gods?”

"…What are you trying to say?"

"…Have you ever seen your god?"

"My god is always by my side!"

"That is to say, you've never actually seen him directly, then?"

"No! When we use our spells, we feel the presence of a mighty being. That is our god!"

"…And who declared that that presence to be a god? The god himself? Or someone using another kind of power?"

Roberdyck recalled the theological debates he had taken part in. There was no clear answer to Ainz's questions. Until today, the priests still debated hotly over whether that was the proof of God's existence.

Just as Roberdyck was about to speak, Ainz interrupted him.

"…Well, supposing these super-dimensional beings—which we shall generously term gods for our purposes—do exist, I wonder if that means they are originally colorless entities. Simply put, they are chunks of power. Because drawing on their power dyes them in a different color and changes the thing… well, they do exist in a world with magical laws, I just wanted someone to chat with someone about this. It wouldn't be funny if there really were gods."

"…"

"My apologies. That was off-topic. The power of the god you believe in. I think we won't be able to learn it… so do you want to take part in a human experiment?"

"…human experiment?"

"That's right. For instance, when we alter your memories so the god

you believe in is someone else, what will happen after that?"

He's insane. That was Roberdyck's deepest and most honest thought about the situation.

No, he's an undead. It wouldn't be strange no matter what he did.

Ainz took a step back, looking with deep interest at Roberdyck. That look was the way a scholar would examine a laboratory animal, and it made Roberdyck want to throw up.

"Why, why do you want to do that?"

"To prove that god exists… eh, I'm not going to bother going on with that joke. Truthfully, I want to become stronger by understanding the nature of that power. And if those beings you call gods really exist, I want to know if they have emotions or thoughts. I want to confirm that. As for me, I have never thought of myself as a chosen being. In truth, there are many others like that."

Roberdyck had no idea what Ainz was talking about.

"Therefore, expanding military preparations is essential. Of course, it may be that no enemies exist, or if they do exist, none of them are as strong as we are. However, don't you think that the leader of an organization shouldn't be negligent? After all, if we rest on our laurels, we're likely to have our feet cut out from under us when we least expect it. Confirming the existence of gods is part of that. "

Ainz shrugged as he finished.

Part 2

Arche panted heavily.

Every time the grass swayed from the wind, her whole body would tremble. Like a small animal, she fearfully looked in every direction.

The surroundings were a forest, and there were many places without light. The spreading canopies of the nearby trees blocked out the light from the sky, and there was almost none on the surface.

Although this environment would normally be difficult for a human being to navigate, in lieu of illumination, Arche used the ‘Darkvision’ spell, which made her surroundings seem as bright as day.

However, even with this spell, she still needed a lot of concentration to pick out grass patches which people could be hiding in, tree trunks that might conceal enemies behind them, and listen to the branches creaking as they swayed in the wind.

As an arcane magic caster, if Arche were confronted by a monster which attacked her, she could not get rid of it by herself. Normally, she would have her colleagues to help her, but the ones who would help her, who would provide cover for her, or heal her, were all absent.

Which meant that all she could do was watch out for signs that an enemy was approaching, keep her distance, and flee. She was on edge because she was keenly aware of this fact, and it sapped her mental strength even more than normal.

Her original plan was to make it to the outside, which meant she would escape with a ‘Flight’ spell. But once she flew above the trees, she saw a gigantic flying creature in the sky which seemed to be searching for something, so she abandoned that plan.

After she confirmed the presence of the giant bat, she could not find it in herself to try and turn it into a contest of speed. That was because even though ‘Invisibility’ could fool visual senses, it could not deceive the special sensory organs of a bat.

After confirming her surroundings were safe, Arche once more flew up at a snail’s pace.

She was proceeding as slowly as possible with her ‘Flight’ spell because she wanted to observe her surroundings. If she went at full speed, she would not be able to react quickly enough even if she were on alert and spotted a threat, and that would mean she would be leaping into the mouth of any monsters which pursued her. In order to avoid this, she deliberately lowered her speed.

Finally, Arche felt the layer of magic energy surrounding her growing thin. Her flight spell was about to run out.

She slowly descended to the ground.

The question now was what should she do. Casting ‘Flight’ again would not be a problem. She could feel that she had enough mana for it. However, ‘Darkvision’ was also a crucial spell, and she also had to reserve enough mana for defensive spells in case of combat.

The 3rd tier spell ‘Flight’ was one of the highest-ranked spells Arche knew how to use. Which also meant that it was one of the most draining spells she had. If possible, she wanted to avoid using it.

Ignoring the present circumstances, even she did not know how long it would take to get out of this forest without the use of spells that would stave off her fatigue. And without the ability to fly, she could not even confirm her current location.

On the way here, Arche had occasionally risen above the forest canopy and used the big tree beside the coliseum as a landmark. If she stayed in the forest, she could not spot the big tree, and she was not able to climb trees either.

“—Where can I rest…”

Arche mumbled to herself.

If she restored her mana through sleep, she could use ‘Flight’ more often, and movement under the sun would be safer. This was particularly true for the forest, where the monsters tended to come up at night.

It might be better for her to curl up somewhere and wait for day to break, rather than force herself to carry on in the dark forest.

But Arche had no idea where the safe places were.

If Imina were here, she would probably know. And if Roberdyck or Hekkeran were around, she could rest easily even in dangerous areas. However, her reliable companions were not with her.

“Imina, Roberdyck—”

Arche curled up beside a huge tree, and thought of her comrades.

“—Liars.”

There had been no word from them after so long.

As expected, they had not been able to escape.

No, that was something she had known from the beginning. There was no way they could beat the ridiculous entity known as Ainz. Even so, was she a fool for holding on to the faint hope of seeing them again?

Arche sat on the ground, leaned her back on the great tree, and closed her eyes. She knew it was dangerous, but she still wanted to close her eyes.

As the memory of the three of them came to mind, she squeezed her eyelids shut.

The icy-cool sensation of the wood against her head was very comfortable. It was only after she had rested for a while that she realized just how tired she had been. Her stress turned into emotional exhaustion, and it rose without stopping.

“—Haaaaa…”

She let her head rest against the tree.

And then she opened her eyes wide.

‘Darkvision’ painted the world of night in fresh, bright colors, but she had no explanation for what she saw in her field of vision.

Someone was watching Arche.

It was like nothing Arche had ever seen before, and her eyes seemed transfixed on the sight of the beautiful girl.

She was dressed in a velvet-soft ball gown dyed in the darkest shade of black, a garment that seemed thoroughly unsuited for her present environment. Her skin was as pale as wax. A single hand stroked her long, platinum hair, which seemed about to brush across Arche’s face.

Though she was a noble daughter, Arche had never seen a girl this beautiful before. If she were to show up at a formal dance, men would flock to her like moths to a flame, purely on the virtue of her beauty. Her crimson pupils radiated an irresistible charm that seemed to draw Arche’s soul into them.

But Arche immediately returned to her senses. There was no way someone like that would be in a place like this. Especially not someone with both feet on the tree trunk, standing parallel to the ground in utter defiance of gravity.

It was obvious that this was a pursuer sent by Ainz. Still, it was not completely impossible that she might have been a resident in the forest for a long time.

“Tag. You’re it.”

Her fleeting hopes had been utterly dashed.

“—A pursuer.”

Arche leapt away to open up a gap, targeting the girl with her staff. The girl seemed disinterested in Arche, and neatly walked down the tree trunk and onto the floor.

“It won’t be fun if you don’t run～”

“—if I defeat you here, I can flee more safely.”

Even as she said this, Arche smiled bitterly in her heart. There was no way she could beat any pursuer sent by Ainz, a being who existed outside the bounds of common sense.

Knowing this, the reason why she said so was to gauge the other party’s reaction.

“Then, by all means, although I can only play with you for a while.”

Her attitude said that she completely understood the difference in power between the two of them. Which was to say, if she fought Arche, she would not be playing around at all.

“—「Flight」!”

Arche cast her spell and began to flee. There was none of the leisurely, slow flight she had demonstrated on the ground. In one swift movement she was aloft, covering her face with her arms as she broke through the forest canopy and soared into the air.

Under the night sky, Arche looked around once more. She was on guard for the bat-like monster she had seen earlier. However, it seemed that it was nowhere around. And so, all that was left was to escape.

“Yes, yes, keep it up, keep it up,”

The beautiful voice called out to Arche, who was desperate to flee. Her heart lurched. Casting desperate glances around, Arche tried to see where it was coming from.

It was from in front and above her.

When had she—the girl from just now was there.

“「Lightning Bolt」!”

Bluish-white lightning leapt from her staff’s head and cleaved through the night. This was Arche’s strongest attack spell. Even though it pierced the girl, the smile did not vanish from her face.

Arche was sure of it. This was a being on par with Ainz, which meant that there was no way Arche could defeat her. The girl cheerfully spoke to Arche, who was eager to flee.

“「Come, my familiars.」”

An enormous pair of wings extended from behind the girl’s back. They were like a bat’s in shape, but far, far larger. An enormous bat flew out from behind her, like it had detached from her body. And of course, no bat with glowing crimson eyes like that could be a mere beast.

The girl smiled from beside the giant bat, whose wings beat steadily through the air. It was a smile that froze Arche’s body like ice, a smile that did not seem to belong on someone her age at all.

“Well then, do continue to flee～”

Arche fled.

She took flight with all her strength.

She flew into the forest to lose her pursuer, and the branches scratched her body as she fled.

Since she had discarded her companions to escape, that meant she had to make it out of here no matter what. In her mind, she would do anything to make that happen.

And after a flight of who knew how long, Arche was faced with despair.

It was a wall.

An invisible wall stood in front of her.

The world went on beyond it, but Arche's body was blocked by that wall. Arche was now two hundred meters above ground level and the invisible wall had reached this high.

"—This is—"

Arche muttered to herself as despair seeped into her heart. She flew and felt around with her hands. But… wall, wall, wall, still a wall.

No matter where she flew, her hands told her there was something hard in her way.

"What is this?!"

"A wall, of course."

It was an answer to her self-directed mutterings. Arche turned around, with an idea of who she might see.

It was as she had expected. The girl from earlier. But now she had a trio of giant bats as her escorts.

"Though it seems you've gotten the wrong impression. This is the 6th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. That is to say, you're underground."

"…This?"

Arche pointed to the world. The sky, the stars, the gently-blowing wind, the forest which stretched as far as the eye could see. Although she did not think this place could be under the earth, when it came to

these people, even that might be a possibility.

“The 41 Supreme Beings, our most august creators, once ruled this place. It was created by them, and even we don’t understand all of it.”

“…They created a world? That would make them like gods…”

“That’s correct. To us, they are beings on the same level as gods. Gods with Ainz-sama as their leader.”

Arche looked around.

She had accepted it. No matter how you put it, after seeing so much, the only thing she could do was accept it.

There was no way she would be returning alive.

“Well then, not fleeing?”

“—Would it even be possible?”

“Of course not. There was never any intention to allow you to escape to begin with.”

“—Is that so?”

Arche gripped her staff tightly with both hands and charged the girl. She could no longer use spells since she was out of mana. However, even in this most hopeless of situations she still had to try her best until the very last moment. This was the duty of Arche, the sole surviving member of Foresight.

“There, there, you’ve done your best.”

The girl’s reply to Arche’s fully-determined charge was little more than bored dismissal.

“Then, your sad little escape attempt ends here... though it’s a shame I couldn’t see you cry.”

The girl easily caught the staff with one hand, and yanked it toward herself. Arche was thrown off balance and fell into the arms of the girl. The two of them ended up embracing in mid-air.

In this position, the girl buried her face into Arche’s neck. Although Arche tried to struggle, the girl who stuck to her like glue could not be shaken off. She breathed hotly on Arche’s neck, and Arche’s body quivered.

“…Mm, the smell of sweat…”

Not being able to keep one’s body clean was part and parcel of the worker’s life for Arche. This was true for all workers, adventurers, travellers, and anyone who spent time moving around outside. Even if they got dirty, the appropriate response would be “So what?”

However, she still felt deeply ashamed at being told this by a girl who was younger and more beautiful than her.

The girl’s face left Arche’s neck. A feeling of revulsion swept up over Arche as she looked into those crimson eyes. Within those eyes burned a lust for the female body, stained with the same carnal desire that men possessed for women.

“Be at ease. You will die without experiencing any suffering. Be grateful to Ainz-sama for his mercy.”

“——!”

Arche wanted to respond, but instead all she felt was surprise - surprise at the fact that her body had been immobilized. It was as though those crimson pupils had stolen away her soul.

At last, Arche realised the true identity of the girl. She was not human, but a vampire.

“…And then…”

The girl’s face drew closer to Arche’s, her tongue slipping past her lips to lightly lick at Arche’s cheeks.

“…Salty…”

The girl laughed, and despair swallowed Arche’s soul.

That only made the girl laugh harder.

Her lips split apart to her ears. The red of her irises spread to engulf their respective eyeballs.

With a cracking sound, she opened her mouth. What had once been neat, pearly white teeth were now things that made people think of medical syringes, in multiple rows like those of a shark. Her lascivious voice was laced with lewd undertones, and clear drool oozed from the corners of her mouth.

And then, terror enveloped Arche completely.

“Ahahahahaha!”

Arche’s mind lost hold on consciousness in the face of the laughing monster that reeked of blood.

The last thing that went through her mind was the faces of her two sisters waiting for her.

“Oooooh? Fainted already? …Then there’s no need to knock you out with magic. You can embrace Death in your dreams~”

Part 3

After entrusting the cleanup of the intruders to others, Ainz sat down on the throne and started up the monitor. As he browsed through the data of Nazarick, the things that he focused the most on were the changes which occurred to the total amount of funds, which were miniscule. This was mostly due to not having activated any traps that consumed a large amount of money. From the looks of things so far, today's experiment could be considered as more than successful.

Ainz smiled—even though it was impossible to show it on his face—towards the tense faced Albedo who was waiting by his side, anxious to hear his evaluation, and praised her.

"Magnificent. Although the intruders this time were a bit too fragile from our point of view, they were considered a fearsome force in this world. And you were even able to accomplish it while keeping expenditure to a minimum, looks like from here on, I can truly be at ease when entrusting the defenses of Nazarick to you, Albedo."

"My deepest gratitude."

Albedo bowed her head deeply while making a relieved expression.

"By the way, Ainz-sama, was it fine timewise?"

"Not a problem. I have already heard from Pandora's Actor, the adventurers have decided to wait another day, or until something changes within the ruins, before leaving."

The fact that none of the workers returned even when it was morning had caused a panic amongst the adventurers, and they had hurriedly reported it to Momon—Pandora's Actor, who suggested that they wait another day. Usually, when something unexpected happened, the most appropriate thing to do was to retreat towards a safer location and assess the situation once more from there. However, things were different due to the presence of an adamantite-ranked team.

"In that case, could I take up a little bit of your time? The truth is, I have a proposal which I hope Ainz-sama would kindly listen to."

“What’s the matter, Albedo? Could you wait a bit? … … Okay, not a problem now.” After verifying once more on the situation regarding Hamsuke and the lizardmen on the monitor, Ainz turned to face Albedo. “What is your proposal about?”

“—Yes” Albedo glanced around at their surroundings before continuing, “It is about the things that were mentioned previously by those foolish ones, regarding the search for the Supreme Beings, what level of priority should we assign it?”

“The highest. Take any actions necessary provided they do not bring harm towards the Great Tomb of Nazarick or reveal us in the process.”

Ainz answered immediately.

“As I thought so. I understand. In that case, here is my proposal: please allow me to personally select the members and be in charge of the unit tasked with the search for the Supreme Beings.”

“What exactly are you suggesting?”

Ainz’s voice deliberately became cold once more. It was because he noticed the dark emotions dwelling inside of him.

There had been opportunities to search for his comrades, but each time the plans were put on hold due to reasons such as “lack of manpower” or “lack of intelligence”.

If they were unable to find his companions even after searching every corners of the world, thoughts like this were the reason why Ainz could not make up his mind. Rather than knowing for sure that he was the only one left in this world, it was easier for him to hold onto the hope that through gathering up enough fame, his companions would eventually be able to find him.

“Yes. Although we were able to immediately determine that what those foolish ones had said previously were lies, I believe there will be times in the future where it will become difficult for us to judge.

For this reason, I think it is necessary for us to have a unit tasked with determining the accuracy of received reports as well as for the search of the Supreme Beings. It would be much better for me to investigate them beforehand, and then report my findings to Ainz-sama."

Ainz held his hand against his chin and muttered, "Is that so…" As he recalled his previous conversation with the workers, what he felt was not anger but a sense of emptiness. There was nothing more unbearable than dancing between hope and despair. As the head of an organisation, he had to disregard his personal emotions and make the decision to move forward whenever a decisive moment appeared, even if it was just a small step.

"Albedo, it doesn't need to be you, right? I had hoped you could remain here to manage Nazarick for me. Regarding the need to go out and search for information… wouldn't Mare and Aura be more suited? Since dark elves exist even in the outside world."

"It is as you say. However, if that was the case, I cannot help but be worried that they might 'run wild'. For example, I would imagine Shalltear would definitely recklessly rush out if information regarding Peroronchino-sama was found. I am uncertain what kind of action Aura and Mare would take if it was information regarding Bukubuku Chagama-sama instead."

"I see…" after thinking about Shalltear, Ainz smiled bitterly. "Indeed, it seems she would act that way."

"That is why I hoped that you would consider allowing me to form my own unit."

"…If information regarding Tabula-san were to be found, would you also 'run wild'?"

"Please be at ease. As someone who holds the position as the Overseer of the Guardians of Nazarick, I would never do something like that. This I promise."

“…I see.”

It was a lot less likely for someone like Albedo, who was both capable and wise at managing the operations of Nazarick, to run wild. Even though there had been a few odd hiccups along the way, she had been able to manage Nazarick without a problem during the times that Ainz wasn’t there, which showed that she deserved to be trusted.

“Personally, I believe Demiurge is also suitable for this task. However, he is burdened with many other responsibilities at the moment. I think it might be too much to add the task of searching for information regarding the Supreme Beings on top of the work he currently needs to deal with.”

“That does make sense. In that case, how about Pandora’s Actor?”

“Yes, as I had hoped. Please allow me to borrow Pandora’s Actor to be my adjutant for this task.”

“I see. Even within Nazarick, the two of you are among the most intelligent, so there will be less likelihood of making mistakes if the two of you handle it together… … Although there is also the task of managing Nazarick’s treasury… Very well, during the times that you require him, you may have priority in borrowing him.”

“My deepest gratitude. Also, is it fine for me to add a few more suggestions?”

Ainz raised his chin, signaling Albedo to continue.

“For the task of searching for the Supreme Beings, I would like to select only those that are capable.”

“Of course. I will provide you with the highest ranked subordinates.”

“My deepest gratitude. After that, if Ainz-sama would be so kind as to create a few undead adjutants for me, that would be most helpful.”

“That request I will have to reject. It is true that the undead adjutants that I make can reach level 90, however—”

The undead that could be created using Ainz’s special skill, the one which required the consumption of his experience points to make—Overlord Wiseman and Grim Reaper Thanatos—just one of them alone would be stronger than any NPC mercenary. However, Ainz wanted to avoid using any skill which consumed experience points for now, as he currently did not have the means to quickly regain them like he could in YGGDRASIL.

“That’s right, it’s better not to do that. Albedo will be in charge of the team; the adjutant will be Pandora Actor. The rest will be selected from amongst the monsters.”

“Understood. There is also one more suggestion that I wish to make, if possible, can we keep the creation of this unit a secret from the other Guardians?”

“How come? Would it not be better to receive assistance from other Guardians?”

“No, if the handling of the received reports was poorly managed, it might result in the leakage of dubious information before it has been verified. If that was the case, the other Guardians or those that were created by the Supreme Beings might end up wanting to come along to check as well. If the received information was a trap, it would put everyone in danger. Because I specialize in defense, it would be possible for me to get away. However, I fear it might be difficult for the others to successfully retreat.”

“A valid reasoning. Very well then, Albedo. Do as you like.”

“I express my deepest gratitude! Ainz-sama!”

Albedo bowed her head deeply, causing her long hair to hang down, covering her face.

“Good. I will be leaving this matter to you then.”

“Of-course! This secretive, specialized unit will carry out the most important order. We will definitely not allow Ainz-sama to regret his decision.”

Albedo’s response seemed a bit strange. If he had to express the feeling in his heart, it would probably have taken the form of a head tilted in puzzlement.

Well, forget it.

“Well then, select your subordinates. Pick from the newly created ones, as long as they haven’t already been assigned with other duties. How many do you need from those that are around level 80?”

“I believe fifteen will be sufficient for now.”

“Fifteen? Isn’t that a little too much…” Ainz stopped speaking and shook his head. Searching for his comrades was an important task. In that case, he shouldn’t be so stingy about it. “Ah, is that so? I understand.”

“Well then, I would like to ask for one more thing. Is it possible for me to take command of Rubedo as well?”

“Rejected.”

Ainz answered immediately.

Nazarick’s strongest individual, Rubedo. Her battle potential was well above that of Sebas, Cocytus, and Albedo in terms of pure melee combat. Shalltear would be a weakling in comparison, given the fact that even Ainz in his full equipment would most likely lose against Rubedo.

The only few that could possibly win against that one would be those stationed on the 8th Floor, and only if they were to use World class items. As expected, I don’t think they could put up a decent fight against that individual otherwise…

“The experiment to start up Rubedo has been more or less a success. I don’t plan on moving her for now. Besides that, is there a reason you require such a high amount of combat power?”

“It’s embarrassing to say, would you still like to hear it?”

“Not a problem?”

“It was rare for a chance like this to happen, so I wanted to create the strongest team.”

“Hahahaha—!”

It was such a childish yet understandable explanation from Albedo which had caused Ainz to burst into laughter. Although his emotions were almost immediately suppressed, a mild feeling of pleasantness still lingered like ripples spreading across water.

“Ainz-sama!”

Ainz smiled to Albedo, who had put on a troubled expression—although his facial expression did not change—and gave the following reply.

“My bad, my bad. Ah, ahem. That was amusing okay? Very well then, in that case, I will allow you to take command of your little sister.”

“Is that fine?”

“Not a problem. Go ahead and make your team. Perhaps in the future, this team of yours could even be used for other things.”

“My deepest gratitude, Ainz-sama.”

Albedo bowed her head deeply once more, hiding her face from view. Even though Ainz was unable to see her expressions, he imagined that she must still be making her usual, gentle smile. As he was about to turn his attention back onto the monitor, Entoma suddenly entered

the throne room. With her back straight and upright, Entoma walked until she reached the throne. With one knee touching the ground, she bowed.

“Please excuse my interruption.”

“What is it, Entoma?”

In response to Albedo’s harsh tone, Entoma replied “Yes” without changing her kneeling posture.

“I am here to report that it is time for Aura-sama and Mare-sama to carry out the next part of the plan.”

“Is that so? …Raise your head.”

After replying once more with a short “Yes”, Entoma raised her head.

“There’s still a bit of time left. So let’s send them off properly. It would be inelegant to do it via telepathy, so I will have to cause some inconvenience for Entoma and have her go and inform the two in person.”

“Understood.”

Albedo quietly watched the figure of Entoma as she stood up and walked away from the throne. She then carefully observed Ainz and asked the following.

“…Ainz-sama, were you feeling unhappy? They should have arranged for a maid other than Entoma to come. I will go and reprimand them later.”

“…What for?”

“For letting Ainz-sama to hear that rude little girl’s voice once more —”

“Ah, I wasn’t bothered at all. What’s more, I was the one who called for Entoma—wait up! Entoma!”

“Yes! Is there something I can do for you?”

Ainz made a gesture towards Entoma who was rushing back in a hurry, indicating that it was fine for her to answer from where she was.

“What happened to the other parts? Were they put to good use?”

“Yes. The head was given to a Silk Hat Demon. The arms were split between the Deadman Strugglers. Demiurge-sama took the skin. The remaining parts were given to Grant’s children to feast on. All in all, I believe that every part had been effectively utilized.”

“Is that so? In that case, it is fine. It is a hunter’s responsibility to not make waste of their prey. Any hunter would most likely have done the same. Think of this as a memorial service.”

“How…very benevolent. To be able to display such kindness to even the dirty thieves that dared to intrude, as expected of a Supreme Being. If Ainz-sama’s words were to be heard by everyone within Nazarick, they will undoubtedly be moved to tears.”

Ainz couldn’t help but feel a little distressed after hearing Albedo’s words overflowing with emotions while seeing Entoma’s eyes shining, filled with respect.

“…Umu. Well, ahem… This was just my personal view; it is not something that I had wished to force onto you guys. But from the looks of things… think of it as a form of etiquette to not waste anything.”

“Understood. In that case, we should also make better use of the others!”

Watching the two of them bow, Ainz couldn’t help but feel that somewhere, somehow, something had gone wrong, and replied with

an “umu”.

Part 4

The ministry of magic had several conference rooms which served as reception rooms, and Fluder was currently headed towards the one that was the most luxuriously decorated. It was the room used only when the Emperor, or those second to him, had arrived.

Before entering, Fluder checked his outfit.

The robes he wore could be considered a first grade clothing suitable even for the grand banquets hosted by the Emperor, and the perfume on his neck and sleeves had a nice fragrance as well.

Originally, Fluder did not concern himself with political or social issues. Rather, in order to concentrate on magic research, he considered everything else to be trivial in comparison. However, due to his position, he still had to maintain awareness of these things.

His own accomplishments were related to the prestige of the Empire, although this was not done intentionally.

Good, no problems.

After confirming to himself that his clothes were flawless, he knocked on the door and entered.

There were two adventurers in this luxurious room. One was a warrior clad in jet black armour, reminding him of the Death Knight he had been staring at not long ago, and at his side was a woman whose beauty caused even Fluder to be taken aback for a moment.

So this is Momon of ‘Darkness’ and the ‘Beautiful Princess’ Nabe.

“I am extremely sorry for having you wait for so long.”

Fluder gently closed the door, then felt a sense of discomfort.

…How strange…

He stood in front of the door, staring at the peerless beauty.

“…I can’t see it?”

Fluder’s eyes should have been able to see the amount of magical talent one possessed, but he accidently voiced his surprise since he was unable to do so.

Fluder had a natural talent to determine the tier of magic one was capable of, just by observing the aura given off by a magic caster.

Despite having heard that the ‘Beautiful Princess’ Nabe from ‘Darkness’ was an arcane magic caster, Fluder’s innate ability was unable to see any aura around her

An anti-detection spell?

This was the only conclusion he could draw, but that raised another question. Why would someone protect themselves from being investigated? Ordinary adventurers would not need to use this. It was difficult to discern one’s strength, and as a result, few people would bother taking precautions against such situations. Besides, it was rude to be casting this kind of defensive magic while meeting with someone.

Well, I was also quite rude myself for using a detection ability on them… But why did they try to hide their power level?

Fluder’s talent was quite well known, so was it a countermeasure against him? He couldn't reach any conclusions.

Addressing Fluder, who was still surprised, Momon spoke.

“Excuse me, is something wrong?”

“Hohoho, sorry for being rude.”

Fluder sat in front of Momon, but he could not take his eyes off Nabe who stood at Momon’s side.

“Ah I see, so this is what’s going on, well then let’s begin.”

Begin what? However, before Fluder had any chance to ask, Momon continued talking.

“...Nabe, I think it’s about time to remove the ring.”

Nabe took off her ring, and in that instant—

Fluder felt as if he had been hit by a storm.

“What!”

He exclaimed without thinking.

Nabe radiated an overwhelming power.

This overflowing storm of pressure did not really exist. Only Fluder and others with similar abilities would feel the torrent of power washing over him.

His body shook violently, as if he was exposed to the icy north wind.

“Im-Impossible…”

Impossible. How could it be possible? How was it possible for someone stronger than himself to exist?

But, even if he tried to deny it, what appeared before his eyes was still reality. Up until this point, his ability to perceive a magic caster’s tier had never failed him.

“7th tier... No, with the huge amount of energy pouring out, could it be... proof of the 8th tier…?”

If that was the truth, then it bordered on the realm of legends.

Fluder was already unable to speak. The 5th tier was already in the realm of heroes, and the 6th tier that Fluder had reached was a realm that nobody had ever attained before. However, someone who had easily attained the higher tiers had suddenly appeared before him.

And it was a young and beautiful woman.

Does her age not correspond with her appearance?

While Fluder was still trembling in shock, he caught sight of Momon taking off his black gauntlet, then removing one of the rings he was wearing.

“_____ ! ”

In that instant, the world was dyed in bright light, and Fluder felt his consciousness fading.

What happened in front of his eyes was unexplainable. Even Fluder, who had lived for over two hundred years, someone who had reached the highest peak of magic attainable for humans, could not understand what was going on.

“What... what... how is this possible?”

Fluder felt something warm flow down his cheeks, but he did not bother wiping it off—or rather, he no longer had the strength to do so. The shock had caused his emotions to descend into chaos.

Who could have seen this coming? The person praised as the Dark Hero was in fact an arcane magic caster who had attained a level that Fluder could never reach.

“If that is the 8th tier, no the 9th tier… No! …… What….. hoooo, god!”

The overwhelming energy released by the dark warrior Momon easily surpassed that of Nabe beside him. If he could surpass Nabe, who was presumably in the 8th tier, then what were the heights of magic that Momon could aspire to?

Fluder answered the question in his mind with his soul.

The 10th tier. Although it did exist in legends, there had never been anyone who could provide absolute proof of its existence. Someone who was in a position to do so had deigned to appear before him.

Fluder, who was standing before, knelt before Momon with tears flowing from his eyes as he spoke.

“……My faith lies in the god that rules and presides over magic. But if you are not that exalted being, then I shall immediately recant my faith, for the one true god has finally appeared before me.”

In his haste to prostrate himself before Ainz, Fluder struck his head on the ground. Yet the pain he felt was nothing compared to the joy he felt surging up from the bottom of his heart.

“I know it’s disrespectful, but allow me to kneel here! Please enlighten me with your knowledge! I want to peer into the abyss of magic! Please! Please!”

“...What are you willing to give in exchange for that?”

The voice was as cold as ice. If a hundred people heard it, they would all answer the same, but what Fluder heard was a sweet voice that soothed the heart. Even if he knew that the voice was laced with poison, what of it?

Fluder did not hesitate for a moment, even if it meant giving up his soul in exchange.

“Everything! Yes, I will offer everything to your royal being! The master of the abyss! The supreme being!”

“…Very well, as long as you are willing to offer everything, what I know will become yours. I will therefore grant your wish.”

“Oh! Ooooohhh!”

His head still pressed to the ground, Fluder cried tears of joy. The jealousy that had frozen his heart for so long seemed to have melted. At long last, his wish from over two hundred years ago might finally come true.

The absolutely overjoyed Fluder did not raise his head, but instead crawled towards Momon’s feet and kissed them. Although he had wanted to lick it at first, he realized that his god-like master might get annoyed if he did that, so he compromised, drawing on the tiny lucid fragment of himself in the corner of his mind.

“So be it. I accept your fealty.”

“Hooo! I am very thankful!… My master!”

“Now then, I will give my first order. Deliver sacrifices to my dominion—”

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“Gramps! Gramps! What is it, gramps?!”

Fluder, who was recalling his past, regained his awareness after realizing someone was calling him. The shocking encounter from a few days ago still gripped his heart, and if he did not focus, his mind might take flight into fantasy again.

Fluder immediately remembered where he was, and nodded slightly to the person addressing him.

“Pardon my rudeness, your Majesty, my mind was elsewhere.”

In front of Fluder was the only person who would call him gramps, the Emperor of the Baharuth Empire, Jircniv Rune Farlord El Nix, and they were currently in the Emperor’s study.

Normally, there would not be so many people gathered in this room. The ones currently present were the Emperor Jircniv, who was accompanied by four of his bodyguards. The Empire’s highest ranked magic caster, Fluder Paradyne was there as well. In addition, even though the Emperor possessed remarkable intelligence, he had ten trustworthy ministers who were capable enough to assist him. One of the Four Imperial Knights, ‘Lightning’ Baziwood Peshmel, was also in attendance.

They all sat at their preferred places, and until recently, they had been discussing the future plans for the Empire. The papers scattered around the room spoke of how intense the meeting had become.

The young man called the Blood Emperor started talking to Fluder in a tone no one else would dare to use.

“No, don’t worry about it. It must be tiring for you to do so much work since you are getting on in years, so you might want to take it easy, but in the end it’s still a job that only grandpa can do. Sorry about that.”

“I am deeply grateful for his Majesty’s kindness. However, I am your Majesty’s loyal subject. Please feel free to give me your orders.”

Fluder, who had come so far, lightly nodded his head.

Ah, I raised a really good child, Fluder thought while looking at the beautiful face of the youth.

Fluder had been serving the Empire for six generations now.

Initially, he did not have a really good relationship with the Emperor from six generations ago. Even so, he had been a skilled magic caster at the time, so when he was recruited, he ended up reaching a prominent position even among the court wizards.

Due to this, his relationship with the imperial family had gradually become closer over the next five generations. When he first acquired the position of head magician, he started educating the Emperor's children from the fourth generation on, but it was mainly related to magic.

Ever since the third generation, he had been instructing them in various subjects, most of which concerned politics.

And now it was the current emperor—a child that everyone adored.

Until now, he had seen many different types of emperors but none of them were incapable. All the children were talented as if they had been picked by the gods—but despite the current Emperor's youth, his talents and abilities outshined the previous emperors by a wide margin. Even though it could be argued that Fluder had been aiding the preparations since two generations ago, the autocratic centralisation of power within the Emperor's person had only been possible due to Jircniv's exceptional skills

Fluder loved Jircniv Rune Farlord el Nix.

He had educated the Emperor and treated him like his own child, and Fluder believed that the Emperor treated him like a father as well.

But even if that was the case—

Fluder was still willing to abandon someone who he saw as his own child.

I wish to peer into the abyss of magic, Jircniv. I will not lose sight of that goal, no matter what I have to sacrifice for it. Even if it is an adorable child like you.

“Then your Majesty, is this why we called off the Kingdom’s invasion?”

“That’s right. The details about the devil calling himself Jaldabaoth are far more important. Gramps, have you found anything from your investigation yet?”

“Regretfully no, your Majesty. Even after the investigation, we still could not find any information about him.”

That’s right. That was how things had turned out.

“Paradyne, can’t you investigate it through magic?”

Fluder narrowed his eyes and looked at the speaker with a serious expression on his face.

“It is true that magic can be all powerful, but that is—”

“—Gramps, sorry. But if you start talking about that subject it’ll take quite long. So, it’s better to stop for now.”

“I understand, your Majesty.”

For a moment, Fluder looked dejected, and then adopted the tone of a teacher and started lecturing the people who seemed like students that kept missing the point.

“There are ways to prevent magical investigation. For instance, did you know this room is proofed against eavesdropping by magic? There are also other things that this room is protected against, and magical investigation is the least of such things.”

“…I understand. Because there are so many counter-measures, it would be difficult to do it.”

“That’s right. However, we would be lucky if the magic simply failed to work. High-tier magic casters can prepare retaliatory

countermeasures to such spells. Some of them can even kill the spellcaster immediately if things go badly."

How could someone of my ability be compared to the Supreme Being? There's no one else more deserving of the title of Supreme Being than him. I need to prove my usefulness to him quickly….

Some people blanched with expressions of distaste as they heard Fluder talk about being killed, but he paid them no heed.

"Taking that into consideration..."

One of the ministers took out a piece of paper.

"There's a place which seems to be the stronghold of a magic caster who goes by the name of Ainz Ooal Gown. Since Paradyne-sama found it through magic, does it mean that the person is less powerful than Paradyne-sama?"

"That's too naive!"

Fluder shouted out loudly as he tried his hardest to forcefully suppress his urge to smile bitterly. This showed how anxious he was.

"Your thinking is too naive. Consider that he saved Carne Village, or rather, only Carne Village. With that in mind, I placed a magical surveillance field around the entire area and it was purely by chance that I saw someone who appeared to be Ainz Ooal Gown entering them. If you forget that this was nothing more than a coincidence, you'll regret it."

Part of that was the truth. Taking the Supreme Being lightly was a foolish move. No, despite the fact that he also used to be like that, he realised how scary it was to be ignorant about it.

Fluder laughed on the inside at how foolish he used to be. He was truly ignorant.

“My apologies.”

He raised his hand to beg his pardon.

“Ah ha, speaking of which, gramps. What happened to the workers that broke into the suspected stronghold?”

“Although our spies, who had been tailing them, have only sent a preliminary report via ‘Message’, they estimate that the workers have been wiped out.”

Jircniv snapped his fingers, and slightly opened his eyes. He had heard that multiple skilled worker groups had been deployed, but it was quite a shocking turn of events for them to be wiped out in just one day, or perhaps even half a day.

Fluder was not really surprised since it was the outcome he had expected, but still showed a surprised expression.

“……Is that so? But speaking of which, it is information gathered through magic, and you know how unreliable that is. How much time will it take for the adventurers to return?”

“Considering that it was an urgent situation where none of the workers had returned, they should have retreated immediately, so it’s estimated that it will still take around four days in total.”

“Including the time needed to gather information from the adventurers… At least five days. So before that, we won’t be able to take any action.”

‘Message’ was not reliable, due to the content becoming less clear over long distances. Many countries did not rely on ‘Message’, for several reasons.

One of them was the tragedy in the country called Gartenbarg.

It happened in that country about three hundred years ago. It was a

nation founded by humans who were mainly magic casters with cities centred around quick exchange of information using ‘Message’. But because they trusted ‘Message’ too much, when they received three falsified messages, a civil war broke out between the cities. Then it was destroyed when monsters and demi-humans invaded.

There were also other examples, such as the songs the bards sang about a man who murdered his wife based on false information.

As a result, few people trusted ‘Message’. Conversely, anyone who relied too much on ‘Message’ was thought of as foolish. Jircniv was one of the smarter ones. While he did make use of ‘Message’, he would also gather information through other sources. He would never trust only in a single spell.

“But, that Earl sure is foolish. If he had hired the workers from E-Rantel, things might have gone more smoothly. He might be dancing within my hand due to his incompetence, but too much incompetence is a problem as well. If he’s going to be the bait, he should at least do a good job of it”

“It is as your Majesty says.”

Fluder’s agreement caused Jircniv to raise a brow.

There were two reasons why he accepted Fluder’s proposal in the meeting couple days ago.

The first, would be to gain an understanding of Ainz Ooal Gown’s character.

After Fluder’s investigation, they confirmed that Ainz had not left the ruin for several days, so they considered it to be his dwelling and sent in the workers to gauge his reaction.

It was to see if he would deal with intruders in a reasonable or a harsh manner.

The annihilation of the workers spoke something of his personality.

The other objective was to sow discord between Ainz Ooal Gown and the Kingdom. Thus, it would have been much better if the workers had been hired from E-Rantel, but unfortunately, that was not an option.

He couldn't have been that foolish, could he?

All the information the Earl had been given was about an unexplored ruin. Knowing that he was going to be delving into a ruin in the Kingdom's territory, he probably didn't have the courage to hire people from the Kingdom as well. Hiring workers from the Empire was thus unavoidable.

But under these circumstances, the relationship between E-Rantel and Ainz Ooal Gown, and the Re-Estize Kingdom on the whole wouldn't deteriorate. If he wanted any hope of accomplishing his second goal, he needed to leak the information about the ruins to the Kingdom's Adventurer's Guild as well.

"Momon came to the Empire at the right time."

"I agree. The information that there was an unexplored ruin as well as the annihilation of the workers will naturally flow to the Kingdom's Guild through his report. They'll start a more serious investigation just like the Emperor wanted."

It was because of this reason that adventurers hadn't been allowed to take part in this at all. Of course, they did not use the Emperor's authority, but rather through spies leaking information to the nobles.

This case needed to be handled as a single foolish noble going rogue. They could deny the Empire's involvement, and then Ainz's hostility would be directed towards the Earl, while Jircniv could take a friendlier approach.

"After the Kingdom's adventurers invade the merciless Ainz Ooal Gown's stronghold, what will the Kingdom's reaction be once they found out about the powerful magic caster living there? And what will the Kingdom's Adventurer's Guild do after they were retaliated

against?”

Jircniv smiled while looking forward to his carefully prepared plans.

“I understand Ainz Ooal Gown’s strength. He is powerful enough to wipe out the worker groups. Our plan to clean up the mess with a single noble’s head. Has it been done yet?”

“Of course, it was done cautiously. No one outside this room should know of the situation.”

“Then, just in ca—What was that!?”

The shaking of the ground interrupted Jircniv mid-sentence. The windows and all of the furniture violently shook around as well, but it was different from the feeling of an earthquake. It felt more like an impact caused by something massive hitting the ground, generating a huge shockwave.

“What happened!? Go and confirm it—damn, it’s noisy. What the hell is going on?!”

Even inside the room, Jircniv could hear the screams coming from outside. This room’s walls had been made quite thick and sturdy, therefore the sound needed to be very loud or there needed to be many people screaming. Just what was happening outside to make people scream like this?

In answer to Jircniv’s doubts, a guard replied from between the gaps of the window’s shutters. He came from the central courtyard, the origin of the sound, and his face was pale.

“Your Majesty! It’s a dragon! A dragon landed on the courtyard!”

For just a moment, the atmosphere in the room froze over. They could not make sense of these words right away, or rather, they could not make sense of these words at all. Even though they knew that the guard had no reason to lie, everyone still rushed to the windows to confirm the situation for themselves.

Jircniv pulled away the curtains peering through a semi transparent window, everyone dropped their jaw at seeing the dragon sitting on the courtyard.

“W-Why is there a dragon here? Where did that dragon come from?”

“Foreign affairs minister! Did you hear of anyone who was going to disrespectfully arrive riding a dragon and land in middle of the courtyard?”

“I know of no such thing!”

“Was there an arrangement with the dragon from the Council? Is that not it!?”

“…Their appearance is completely different from what I had heard. The description from the ministry of foreign affairs should not be wrong.”

“No, the biggest problem is that the thing was allowed to get this far! The Emperor is here! What are all the palace guards doing?”

Dragons could be said to be the mightiest beings in the world, with powerful bodies wrapped in sturdy scales, a lifespan far exceeding those of human beings, as well as all manner of special abilities and magic. Of course, there were exceptions as well, and some dragons had been slain by adventurers in the past, but there were just as many cases in the past where cities and even countries had been destroyed by the flames of wrathful dragons. One such city in the south had been destroyed just twenty years ago.

For such a being to appear in the middle of the imperial palace, it was a dire emergency.

Just as Jircniv gulped while looking over the dragon, two small figures descended from the dragon’s back.

If one squinted their eyes, they could see that they were children tanned by the sun.

“They seem to be dark elves.”

Fluder calmly uttered the race of those two children.

“Paradyne! That dragon, where is it from? And where did these two come from?”

“That dragon was something even I didn’t know about...”

Naturally, the same went for the two people who had disembarked, and the dragon that had landed in the courtyard was soon surrounded by a ring of knights. Although the knights were the pride of the Empire, in the face of a dragon they did not seem very reliable. As was to be expected of the strongest living creature in the world.

Among the knights, a man holding a shield on each arm came forward.

“Oi, oi. He’s the one going out? Well, it can’t be helped… although losing him is definitely going to be a waste.”

The person who moved forward was one of the Four Imperial Knights, the ‘Immovable’ Nazami Enec.

Nazami was one of the Empire’s most powerful warriors, and in terms of defense he was considered to be the strongest among the Four Knights. But even as a warrior who could resist many types of attacks, he still looked too small and insignificant in comparison to a dragon. Those were the words spoken by “Lightning” Baziwood Peshmel, as though confirming his comrade’s death, and nobody could deny them.

“Your Majesty, please retreat!”

“Tell me then, where can we retreat to? Where would we be safe?”

In response to the minister's proposal, Jircniv snorted.

“But your Majesty!”

“I know what you all want to say. But abandoning the palace will make me a laughing stock. Even if the opponent is a dragon, which doesn’t seem to be from the Agrando Republic, and if it is making such a move knowing that I won’t escape…… then that dragon may be as intelligent as I heard them to be, it seems to know the political situation of the Empire very well.”

Although Jircniv kept the nobles on a tight leash, that was only possible with the help of the knight orders. If news spread that he had fled the capital because of a dragon, the nobles might think that Jircniv’s military power was weak, and thus band together in revolt. Although he would not lose to an unruly mob, the Empire’s national power would fall drastically.

Even if we fight or retreat, there will still be a huge loss. This sure is an annoying chess move, just what is the story behind that dragon?

In the end, the number of people in the courtyard increased again. Forty royal guards surrounded the dragon, along with sixty knights, and even arcane and divine magic casters were present among their numbers.

“Only having one hundred and twenty people sure is unsettling. Your Majesty, how about letting me join them?”

Jircniv’s eyebrows furrowed slightly. Fluder was the Empire’s greatest trump card. Yet, it was unclear if it was wise to let him deal with a dragon, whose species was known to be strong. Thus he was hesitant, but he also trusted that Fluder could safely escape back to him even in the worst situation.

But there was something Jircniv did not know.

The old magic caster had made that suggestion so Jircniv could not retreat using Fluder’s teleportation magic.

“Understood, gramps. Could you tell ‘Immovable’ to retreat as well?”

“Understood. However, I can’t estimate the strength of these people. They should be very powerful, so if you want to retreat, you should start making preparations now.”

With that said, Fluder opened the window. He flew out using flight magic and hovered in the sky.

“Now then, can everyone hear me!? I am a servant of Ainz Ooal Gown-sama, Aura Bella Fiora!”

During that exact moment, another voice echoed through the air.

“The Emperor of this country sent a bunch of disrespectful people to the Great Tomb of Nazarick where Ainz-sama lives! Ainz-sama is very unhappy, so if the Emperor does not apologise, we will destroy this country!“

Jircniv’s face twisted. How did they come to that conclusion? How did they piece together all the small clues?

As he looked back into the room, he found expressions of surprise staring back at him. Then, when they realized what Jircniv had in mind, they shook their heads.

“For starters, let’s kill everyone here! Mare!”

The other dark elf standing by his side thrusted her staff toward the courtyard. In that instant, a localized earthquake seemed to shake the courtyard. Because it was contained, Jircniv did not feel much of the strong shaking. However, the earth screamed and a complex pattern of cracks opened up in the ground, like a spiderweb with the elves and the dragon at its heart.

Except for Fluder who was floating in the air, the knights, the guards, the magic casters, everyone else was swallowed by the earth.

The dark elves must have placed themselves outside of the earthquake’s effective range, because they were unaffected. The dark elf calmly withdrew her staff, and as quickly as it had occurred, the

rents in the earth were sealed once more. The spiderweb-pattern of cracks sealed themselves in the opposite manner of how they appeared, returning the ground back to when it was originally before.

The knights gathered in the courtyard just now were nowhere to be seen. It was truly a shocking conclusion.

“Good, they’re all dead! Now, if he doesn’t show himself soon, we’ll kill everyone in the city next… Since we don’t know which one’s the Emperor, we’ll just wreck this entire city and stop caring about anything! So come out, come out, Emperor, wherever you are!”

“Y-your Majesty!”

The trembling servants addressed him with pale faces.

“…I was about say that we stepped on a dragon’s tail, but in the end, the dragon came instead.”

Jircniv struggled to control his trembling. As an absolute being who wielded the authority of an Emperor, he could not afford to show fear in front of his subjects.

Ainz Ooal Gown… who is this person… … No, now is not the time to think about that.

Jircniv turned to the window and shouted.

“I, Emperor Jircniv Rune Farlord El Nix, have something to say! Dear emissaries, would the two of you like to continue this discussion inside?” He then turned his head to his servants, “Prepare the finest welcome for our guests! With haste!”

As his servants hurriedly rushed out, he looked back to the dark elves.

…I underestimated them. However, if these are just subordinates… how can I not handle them? Even so, I can’t retreat here. If they want to

negotiate, then we shall have a war of words. Ainz Ooal Gown, I will break your ambitions here!

Epilogue

“Well then, here are the one hundred gold coins as promised. And this is the contract.”

After taking a quick peek at the contents of the bag, Arche’s father nodded his head in satisfaction. Without any hesitation, he quickly signed his name on the parchment and then stamped it with their family seal. His fluid actions revealed that this wasn’t the first time that he had done this.

“Now there shouldn’t be any problems, right?”

Eyeing the parchment that was handed to him, the man nodded. If Hekkeran and Imina were here, they would definitely reveal their displeasure. This man was the same man that had visited them previously at the inn.

The man glanced at the parchment a few more times while he waited. After verifying that the ink had finished drying, the man carefully rolled up the parchment, and stored it.

“Yes, most certainly.” Pointing towards the bag of coins in front of Arche’s father, the man asked, “By the way, are you not going to

check?”

“Heh, I’m fine with it even if it’s one or two coins short.”

“Is that so?”

Towards the generous yet foolish response made by Arche’s father, the man nodded once more.

The amount of coins had already been verified before, so there shouldn’t be any problems. But it was definitely not a good sign seeing a family that was nearly at the end of their rope to still be acting this way. No, perhaps their house was fated to end the moment that man became its master.

However, it was exactly people like these that made the best customers.

“Well then, you’re fine with the usual interest rate and loan term, I presume?”

Towards this question, Arche’s father responded in a manner as if he was without a doubt someone from a wealthy and high class background.

The man nodded his head once more, showing that he understood.

“…By the way, is your daughter still well and healthy?”

“Hm?”

The man suddenly remembered that there were three daughters in the family.

“I’m talking about Arche-san.”

“Ah, Arche huh? Right now she’s out making money.”

"…Is that so?"

While your daughter is out and about earning money, what are you doing instead?

A look of disdain briefly appeared in the man eyes as he thought about this. He started to pity the girl with this kind of a father.

The man wasn't without emotions.

However, it was more important for him to recover the amount of coins that had been lent previously including the interest on top, and to ensure this cycle of loan and repayment continued. He couldn't care less about meddling in other family's businesses.

"Just because she was able to make a bit of money, she started to act arrogantly."

The man frowned when he heard the unpleasant mumblings made by Arche's father. After all, if a troublesome situation was to happen, it might cause a delay in the interest payment. If possible, the man would like the current situation to continue as long as possible. For that, he couldn't help but ask.

"Did something happen?"

"No, nothing big. It's just that my foolish daughter seemed to have forgotten about her obligations to her parents for raising her from birth and is starting to become disrespectful."

"If it's just that then…"

"Honestly! It's about time to let her understand her insolence! I need to teach her what being an aristocrat is all about!"

The man swallowed the rest of what he wanted to say. However, he couldn't help but let out a final remark.

“It must have been really troublesome.”

“Of course. Such a foolish daughter…”

The man had purposely omitted who it was that he was talking about and allowed Arche’s father to mistakenly believe that it was said for him, which resulted in more and more muttering.

One hundred gold coins was an incredible sum. However, at the rate that Arche’s father was spending, he would soon be out of money again. If that happened, he would most likely come back to borrow more. The man had already decided not to lend any more until the money previously lent had been repaid.

The man glanced around the room.

What he saw was a room filled with luxurious furniture and decorations. Should the worst happen, he should still be able to recover what was originally lent, even if he had to sell them.

The man lowered his head in order to hide his thoughts.

“In the end, isn’t it weird for the daughter of the Furt family to be doing that kind of dirty work? The friends that she associates with all seemed to be of common birth too, they probably share the same vulgar character.”

“…Is that so?”

The man thought deeply about the two people that he met in the inn, and finally gave his reply. Perhaps it was due to misunderstanding the tone of the man’s reply, Arche’s father quickly spoke once more.

“Mu, I didn’t mean all commoners are like that. I was mostly referring to those that are adventurers.”

“Perhaps that is so.”

“Isn’t it? My daughter began to rebel exactly because of them. I will need to properly punish her later. In the end, it is natural for a daughter to listen to her father. She’s still ten years too early to be giving me lectures.”

After taking one final glance at the unhappy father, the man stood up from his seat.

“…Anyway, I must head over to the next customer now. We will talk more next time. I will be counting on you for the timely repayments.”

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“Just when will onee-sama return?”

“Perhaps a little longer?”

Inside a certain room, using the bed as a chair, two young girls sat side-by-side next to each other. Their facial features were exactly the same.

A slight flush of red could be seen on their tender white cheeks, which made them look like little angels. They possessed delicate faces which looked very similar to their older sister’s. One could definitely anticipate just how their appearance would bloom in ten to twenty years’ time.

The two of them wore matching outfits consisting of a pure white dress without a single ruffle. Their small white feet dangled from below, making a ‘pa-ta’ ‘pa-ta’ sound as they aimlessly kicked into the air.

“Is that true?”

“It is true…”

“Is that so?”

“That is so…”

“When onee-sama return, we will be moving right?”

“That’s right…”

The two of them laughed happily. They had very little understanding on the meaning of moving, but they did know it meant that their favourite onee-sama would no longer be going away. That was the source of their excitement.

Their sister—Arche, often had to leave home for extended periods of time. Although they did not know what she did, they understood that it was something important. That was why they never voiced any selfish wishes to Arche. However, even so, they couldn’t help but have the desire to wish to be able to play with their gentle sister more.

That’s right, the two of them loved Arche very much.

She was an extremely gentle, knowledgeable and warmhearted sister.

“Onee-sama, still hasn’t arrived…”

“Still hasn’t arrived huh…?”

“Looking forward to it aren’t we, Kuuderika?”

“Un, very looking forward to it, Uleirika.”

“I want to read together with onee-sama…”

“I want to sleep together with onee-sama…”

“Kuuderika is too cunning…”

“Uleirika is also very cunning…”

The two of them looked at each other and a smile then began to form on their faces, gradually turning into cute sounds of laughter.

“In that case, Kuuderika can also join in, together with onee-sama and I.”

“Un, Uleirika can also as well, together with onee-sama and I.”

The two of them smiled once more, looking forward towards the fun and exciting future that awaited them.

Afterword

While the Workers were being tortured, Maruyama-san and myself were also tortured (at least the orders given seemed that way) until we cried tears of blood.

So-Bin

Seven months have passed since volume six was published. Long time

no see, I am Maruyama.

By the time this volume get published, it would be the end of August, when summer is at its peak. When Maruyama was young, I felt the heat receding when September comes along, but that isn't so right now, it still feels hot in mid September. That was just my memories when I was young, it would be strange if nothing had changed at all.

As Maruyama puts on another layer of clothes known as fats, I once again affirm that I hate summer. In order to cool the computers down, I spend most of my time in an air conditioned room, but I still sweat a lot when I travel to my company. Perfume/Cologne would be overwhelmed by my sweat, this is the worst.

That's how it is. Would the people who saw the belt on the book shout out in amazement? They might think that this must be an illusion caused by the heat of the summer or something.

However, this is the truth!

Even Maruyama shrieked "Are you for real!" as the project progressed. Overlord is getting an anime!!

In order to achieve great results, I will work hard, please take care of me!

I will bear with my stomach pain and enter the part where I express my gratitude.

It is an honour for the history of lightnovels for So-bin-sama to provide his unbelievable book illustrations. That's how Maruyama feels, and the readers must be thankful for you too! Let's eat out together next time! Kōdodezainsutaji-san, thank you for your cool designs as usual. Osako-sama who is responsible for the proofreading and editing, thank you for your pointers.

F-tan-sama the editor, who advises Maruyama seriously and recommended Kyouhoku for the illustrations without hesitation. Please don't push yourself and work in moderation.

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Thank you readers for purchasing my book!

2014 August Maruyama Kugane

Character 29

ニューロニスト・ペインキル

Heteromorphic Race

neuronist painkil

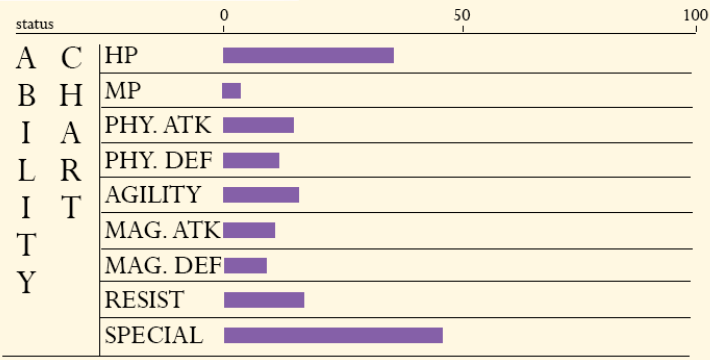
FIVE GREATEST EVIL
MOST EVIL JOB

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Special Intelligence Gatherer (AKA: Interrogator)		
Residence	5th Floor Frozen Prison, Room of Truth (Pain is not to tell)		
Alignment	Great Evil	Sense of Justice:	-425
Racial Level	Brain Eater		7 lv
Job Level	Bishop		2 lv
	Doctor		10 lv
	God Hand		3 lv
	Others		

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 23 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 7 level — Total 16 level



Character 30

恐怖公

Heteromorphic Race

Kyouhukou

FIVE GREATEST EVILS MOST EVIL IN HOMES (RESIDENCE)

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 2nd Floor Area Guardian	
Residence	2nd Floor, "Black Coffin" (Black Capsule)	
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice: -10
Racial Level	Insect Druid	10 lv
	Others	
Job Level	High Druid	5 lv
	Summoner	3 lv
	Entomomancer	2 lv
	Minimum (Charging Fee) <TL Note: Micro-transaction>	3 lv
	Others	

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 30 level

Racial level — Job level

Total 12 level — Total 18 level

status

ABILITY CHART	0	50	100
HP			
MP			
PHY. ATK			
PHY. DEF			
AGILITY			
MAG. ATK			
MAG. DEF			
RESIST			
SPECIAL			

Character 31

ヘッケラン・
ターマイト

Human
Race

hekkeran termite

PILLAR OF THE TEAM

Job	Leader of Foresight	
Residence	The Inn, "Singing Apple"	
Job Level	Fighter	? lv
	Fencer	? lv
	Sword Dancer	? lv
Birthday	Upper Wind Month, 3rd day	
Hobby	Counting how much money he saved up	

{ personal character }

Lightly armed, dual sword wielding warrior who utilized speed and multiple strikes. As the fourth son of a merchant family, he aimed to become an adventurer. However he really liked money, and before he realized what he was doing, he was already a worker. Tends to act thoughtlessly once he decided that there is no danger, thus earning Imina's scoldings. But thanks to his superior leadership skills, Foresight was a worker team with few enemies.

Character 32

アルシェ・イーブ・リリッツ・フルト

Human Race

arche eeb rile furt

BELOVED OLDER SISTER WHO IS ALSO A YOUNGER SISTER HERSELF

Job	Member of Foresight	
Residence	The Inn, 'Singing Apple' (feels more like home)	
Job Level	Wizard	? lv
	Academic Wizard	? lv
	High Wizard	? lv
Birthday	Middle Wind Month, 26th day	
Hobby	Reading (Various genres)	

{ personal character }

A wizard who studies the academic aspect of magic amongst the arcane magic casters. When her family lost its aristocratic status, she gave up all her dreams to become a worker. Doted on by the members of the Foresight as their cute younger sister, she looks up to them as older siblings. Everyone around her thinks she is a genius, but she is actually more of a silent hard worker than a talented person. She almost reached the limits of her growth potential.

Character 33

イミーナ

Human
Race

imina

SMART AND AGILE ARCHER

Job	Member of Foresight	
Residence	The Inn, 'Singing Apple'	
Job Level	Ranger	? lv
	Rogue	? lv
	Bush Walker	? lv
Birthday	Upper Fire Month, 29th day	
Hobby	Spacing Out (While doing nothing)	

{ personal character }

A half elf whose father is an elf and mother is a human. Father is still healthy and alive. Possesses talent allowing her to 'float well in the water and tend not to sink' (doesn't mean she can't sink at all). But does not like to swim because she was once greatly humiliated when she was attacked by a monster near a body of water.

Character 34

ロバーデイク・
ゴルトロン

Human
Race

roberdyck goltron

KIND AND GENTLE CLERIC

Job	Member of Foresight	
Residence	The Inn, 'Singing Apple'	
Job Level	Cleric	? lv
	High Cleric	? lv
	Templar	? lv
Birthday	Unknown	
Hobby	Weekend Carpentry	

{ personal character }

He worked originally as a high class cleric, but chose the career of a worker when he became tired of not being able to save people due to bureaucratic red tapes. He is a kind individual who donates part of his income to orphanages and often works in place of like minded clerics who are unable to act. It may not be apparent, but he is someone who receives admiration and praise from many.

Credits

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Translator	—	Ferros Nigel Ohime-sama SifaV6 Skythewood Rockgollem ZackTan
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